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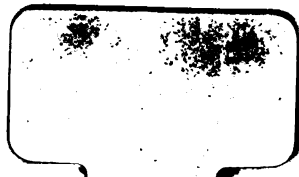
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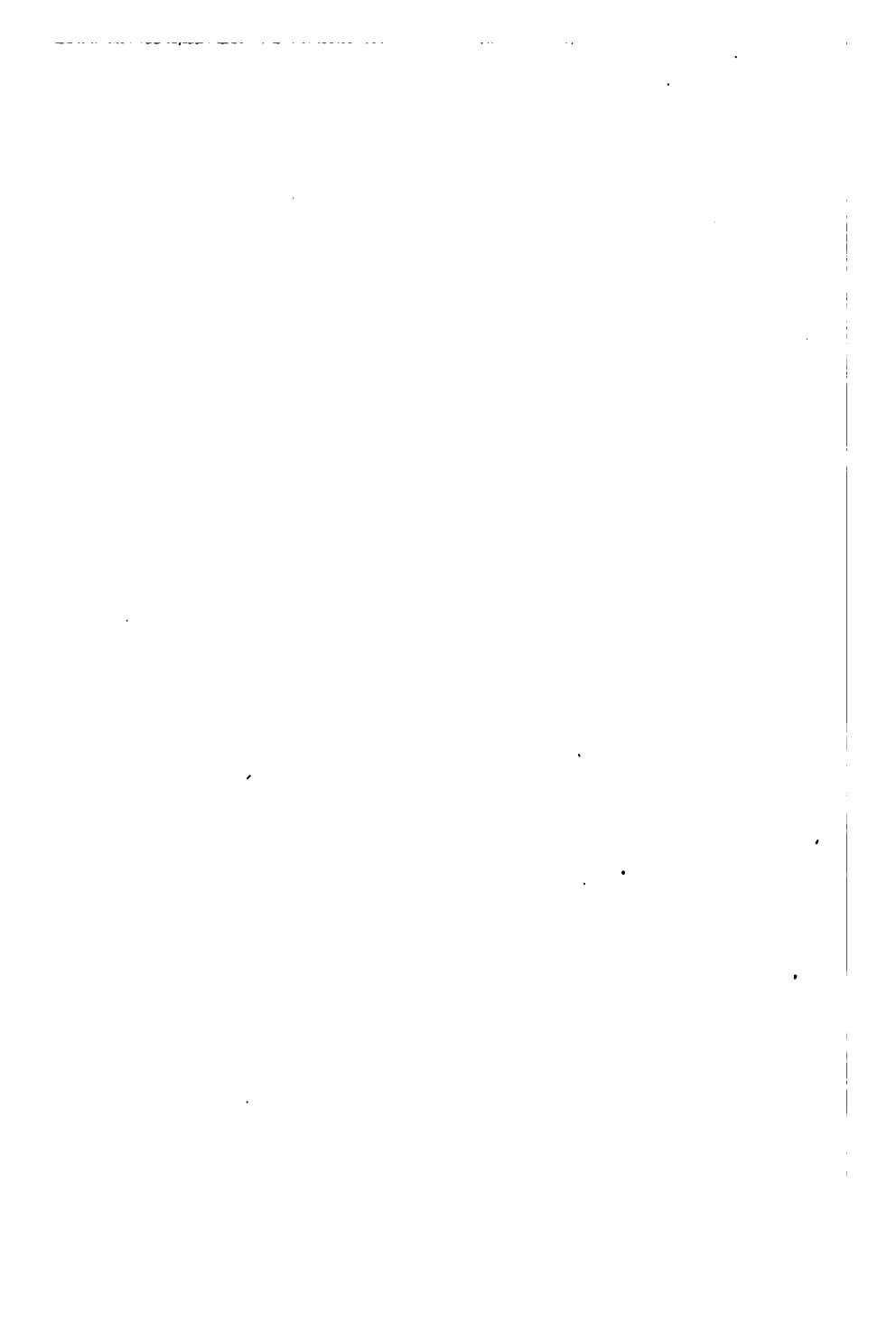
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HELENA
LADY HARROGATE



HELENA LADY HARROGATE

A Tale

BY
JOHN BERWICK HARWOOD

AUTHOR OF 'LADY FLAVIA'

IN THREE VOLUMES.—VOL. II



LONDON
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HELENA, LADY HARROGATE.

CHAPTER I.

UNDER THE PARK WALL.

ALL through that August day which witnessed the hurried journey of Mr. Richard Hold, master mariner, from the river-side bowers of Plugger's to the silvan shades of *The Traveller's Rest*, Sir Sykes Denzil's ward was in a state of feverish agitation, which was hard for even her to conceal from those about her. We may fairly own that women surpass us in the social diplomacy which they study from the cradle almost, and that their powers of suppressing what they

feel—not seldom from a noble motive—are greater than ours. All of us must have wondered, as we read the marvellous narratives of such prisoners as Trenck and Latude, at the patient ingenuity that could contrive rope-ladders out of the flax thread of shirts, files out of scraps of rusty iron, tools from any fragment of metal that came to hand. None the less should we be astonished at the power of dissembling evinced by the captives on the watch for the propitious moment to break prison.

What Ruth dreaded above all other things was what a woman always does dread, the scrutiny of her own sex. That men are credulous, careless, prone to give credit to the shallowest excuse, readily

hoodwinked, and easy to pacify, has been an article of faith with Eve's daughters since pre-historic times. The real spy to be feared, the real censor before whom to tremble, is decidedly feminine, in the estimation of women who have anything to hide. Ruth therefore devoted her whole attention to keeping up a brave outside before the eyes of her guardian's daughters, Blanche and Lucy, two as honestly unsuspecting girls as could be met with in all Devonshire.

But as all *a priori* reasoning is tainted with the fatal flaw of bad logic, Ruth forgot Jasper Denzil, still shut up in the house on account of his recent accident, and whose crooked mind had not much to do save to employ itself in fathoming

the crooked ways of others. Now a man, if circumstances coerce him to limit his powers of observation to the narrow sphere of domesticity, is capable of becoming a spy more formidable than women would readily admit. If he sees less, he reasons more cogently as to what he does see, and he has the further advantage of being an unsuspected scout from whom no danger is anticipated.

Jasper Denzil had excellent reasons for the profound mistrust with which he regarded the Indian orphan. The very presence beneath his father's roof of such a one as Ruth was in itself a standing puzzle and challenge to his curiosity. That she was Hold's sister, the sister of a coarse-mannered adventurer of humble birth, was

what the captain could not bring himself to believe. For Ruth seemed innately a lady. Either she must have had the advantages of gentle nurture and education, or as an actress in the never-ending social drama she displayed consummate skill. But whatever might have been her birth (and there were times when he was tempted to fancy that in her he saw that young sister of his own, long dead, the date of whose decease was supposed to coincide with that of the sad mood which had become habitual to Sir Sykes), Jasper with just cause regarded her as a most artful person.

The ex-cavalry officer remembered well enough that interview between Sir Sykes and Hold, at which he had played the

part of an unsuspected audience. The demand to which his father had acceded was that Sir Sykes should receive in a false character Hold's sister as an inmate of Carbery. True the seafaring fellow—smuggler, pirate, or whatever he might be—had laughed mockingly, and had spoken in strangely ironical accents when dictating to the baronet on this subject. But be she who she might, Ruth must be either an accomplished schemer or the willing instrument of others, or she would not have been where she was.

It may have been a petty malice, suited to his feline nature, that caused Jasper on that particular night to remain downstairs later than usual, causing his sisters also to defer their retiring to rest for an

extra half-hour. They kept early hours at Carbery as a rule, as rich people, in the profound dulness of the dignified ease which is not enlivened by guests, are sometimes apt to do. Sir Sykes, who always stayed long enough in the drawing-room to sip his coffee, was the first to disappear ; but no one save himself and his valet knew when he left the library for his bedroom. When the captain was in health it was his custom to spend an hour or two in trying rare combinations of skill and luck among the ivory balls in the billiard-room ; but since the steeple-chase he had been glad to retire unfashionably early.

It was because he fancied that Miss Willis was impatiently awaiting the moment .

for separating for the night, that Jasper chose to delay it; but at length the time came when the good-nights had been exchanged, and the drawing-room was abandoned. Captain Denzil's room, which adjoined the picture-gallery on the first-floor, was immediately beneath that occupied by the Indian orphan. Repeatedly, after he reached it, did Jasper fancy that he heard a light swift step overhead, as if Sir Sykes's ward were hurrying to and fro; and then his sharpened ear caught the sound of a stealthy tread upon the oaken staircase.

Extinguishing the lights for the time being, Captain Denzil threw open his window, which overlooked the park; and by the time his eyes grew somewhat accustomed

to the darkness, he saw, or thought he saw, a female form glide from under the black shadow of the giant sycamores and flit bat-like away through the solitary gloom.

“If it were not for this provoking arm,” said the captain, who was still, despite the skilful care of worthy little Dr. Aulfus from Pebworth, suffering less from his hurts than from the Nemesis that dogs the steps of the hard-liver, “I’d win the odd trick to-night. But if I can’t follow to see who it is that she meets, at any rate I shall get a second peep at yonder ingenuous creature when she comes back. A rare moonless night it is for such an errand !”

Jasper’s eyes had not deceived him. It was Ruth whose slight figure had passed away into the deepening shadows of the

night, crossing the park towards its northern boundary, which abutted upon the broken country leading to the royal forest, treeless, but none the less in sound law the forest of Dartmoor. It was so dark that even one better accustomed to the locality might have failed to keep to the right course among narrow, and grass-grown paths, many of them trodden by no human foot, but by the cloven hoofs of the deer trooping down to pool or pasture.

Yet Ruth threaded her devious way past holt and thicket, past pond and hollow, almost as well as the oldest keeper on the estate would have done, and presently gained the gate which, as has been already remarked, stood always open on the northern side of the park, corresponding to that on

the southern or seaward side, for, as has been said, the public had an ancient right or user to traverse Carbery Chase. But as a right of ingress for men might imply a right of egress for deer, some zigzag arrangement of iron bars had been set up, screen-like, at either extremity of the footpath, and this effectually restrained the roving propensities of the antlered herd within.

“So—you are late, Ruth! I have kicked about here, till I began to think you’d thrown me over. No wonder, living among fine folks, that you’re getting to care little how long a rough fellow like yours to command is kept on the look-out.”

Such was the surly greeting of the stout sailor-like man whom Ruth found irritably pacing to and fro under the lee of the wall.

•

“I could not come, brother, one moment earlier without arousing suspicion that might be the ruin of us both,” answered the girl steadily, but in a conciliatory tone. “And what, after all, signify a few minutes more or less of expectation, compared with a life of constant effort, constant watchfulness, and the sense of depending on one’s self alone in the midst of enemies who sleep beneath the same roof and feed at the same table? I tell you that the tension on my nerves is far greater than I ever dreamed that it would be, and that there are times when I even fancy that I shall be driven mad by the strain imposed upon me of playing a part, ever and always, without rest or respite !”

Ruth’s voice as she proceeded had grown

.

shrill and tremulous with the effect of the emotions, long pent up, that found expression at last, and she pressed her slender hand upon her heated brow with a gesture which Hold was not slow to mark.

“Come, come, Missy,” he said in accents far more gentle than those which he had first employed; “you’ve taken this thing, whatever it is, too much to heart. See, now; I’d never have suggested the plan if I had not believed that in the house of Sir Sykes Denzil, Baronet, you’d have been like a fish in water. Didn’t we always call you in joke ‘My Lady,’ and that because your ways weren’t as our plain ways? Haven’t you got your head stuffed as full of book-learning as an egg is full of meat? Aren’t you dainty and proud and what not? Till

folks declared, to be sister o' mine, you must have been changed at nurse. And now do you find it a hardship to have to consort with yon Denzil people?—not your equals, I'll be bound, if all had their due."

"You can't understand me, Brother Dick," said the girl softly, and turning away her face. "Give me, I say, a real standpoint; let not my life be a lie, and I should fear no comparison with those who are daily my dupes. But I hold my tenure of the bed I sleep on, the bread I eat, by mere sufferance, and I see no way as yet to"—

"That fop—the dandy Lancer fellow—Captain Jasper don't seem to take to you then?" asked Hold; and Ruth winced perceptibly at the blunt question.

"Captain Denzil will never, I imagine,

care very much for any one but his dear self," she answered gently. "Now that he is an invalid—though he will soon be out and about again—he thinks that he pays me no small compliment in preferring my conversation to the insipid society of his excellent sisters. But I no more expect a proposal of marriage from Jasper Denzil than I expect the sky to fall."

"That's a pity," said Hold dryly; and then a pause ensued. "You didn't send for me, Missy, to tell me that?" he added, after some moments spent in thought.

"No!" returned Ruth in her low clear voice. "I sent for you that you might read a letter—how obtained I leave you to guess—which concerns us both. Have you the means of doing so?"

"Catch me without light, Missy!" complacently replied the seaman, drawing from one of his deep coat-pockets a small dark-lantern, which he lighted. "Now for this letter," he said; and receiving it from Ruth's hand, read it attentively twice over. As he did so, some rays from the shaded lantern that he held illumined his resolute face.

"Wilkins, eh? Enoch Wilkins. That's the name the craft hails by; and he's a land-shark, it seems," muttered Hold, as he refolded the document.

"He is a London lawyer, as you see," explained Ruth; "and all I know of him, gleaned from various sources, is that he was the captain's creditor for a large sum, which Sir Sykes has very recently paid. He is, I

gather, a sort of turf solicitor of no very good repute, and has somehow a grip on poor weak Sir Sykes. Now the baronet, I feel sure, has but one secret"——

♪ "That, you may be certain of!" interjected Hold.

"And this man knows it and trades on it," said the baronet's ward eagerly; "and in doing so his path crosses ours. See! The word 'others,' which is underlined, must surely have reference to you and me. Rely on it, he has an inkling of our plans, and may counteract them."

"Take the wind out of my sails, will he, eh?" said Hold grimly, and with a threatening gesture.

"Brother Dick, Brother Dick, when will you learn wisdom!" said his sister, smiling.

“Your buccaneer tricks of clenched fist and angry frown are as out of place in peaceable England as it would be to strut about with pistols and cutlass. You are not on the West Coast now, or off the Isle of Pines, or in the Straits of Malacca, to carry things with a high hand. Our plain course is to make an ally, not an enemy of this lawyer. He knows much, but perhaps not all, and may be induced to accept as true the story that has been told to Sir Sykes. In any case, he cannot be very scrupulous ; and will not be desirous, by bringing about a dispute and a scandal, to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs. The baronet’s purse is deep enough for all of us.”

“You’re right ?” rejoined the sailor, with a whistle that was meant to express un-

bounded admiration for his sister's shrewdness. "I'll make tracks to London, and see what terms can be made with Commodore Wilkins, before he shows his face here."

"Tell him nothing that he does not know," said Ruth, as the pair separated.

"Trust me for that!" was Hold's confident reply.

Jasper, still at his window, caught but a glimpse of the girl's slight form as it glided by and re-entered the house.

CHAPTER II.

FIRE !

"THERE is nothing so hard, nothing so difficult as to get a governess nowadays," said the Countess of Wolverhampton, quite unaware that she was but echoing the complaint of many ladies of a lesser degree, to the effect that it is next to impossible to procure pattern cooks, prize housemaids, exemplary seamstresses, or model kitchen-maids, in these degenerate times. "I mean a really satisfactory governess of course," added the noble mistress of High Tor. Lady Wolverhampton and her two elder daugh-

ters were the sole occupants of the smallest of the suite of drawing-rooms, the windows of which were yet open to admit the balmy air of the hot evening. Dinner was but just over, and the flush of the sinking sun was faintly visible on the heathy ridges and pine groves to the west.

"It is very tiresome, mamma," said sympathetic Lady Maud.

"It is more than tiresome," rejoined the Countess. "It makes me, on your sister's account, very anxious. If I had known, when Miss Grainger left us, how very long it would take to replace her, and that dear Alice would be for months at a stand-still so far as her education went, I should not have parted with her so readily."

"But she left us because she was going

to be married," said Lady Gladys smiling; "and we could not, I suppose, have forbidden the banns on account of the scarcity of good governesses. I wonder, by the way, how the scarcity can exist, when we are so perpetually informed that the governess market—a phrase which I don't like, suggesting as it does white slavery, involuntary servitude, and the auctioneer's hammer—is overstocked."

"That sounds clever, Gladys," answered Lady Wolverhampton in her plain way; "but I am afraid that, like most clever-sounding things, it proves nothing. I could get a highly certificated instructress, a person primed with information on particular subjects, warranted to be worth a handsome salary, a"—

"A teaching-machine, in fact," suggested bright Lady Gladys, seeing that her mother hesitated for the lack of a word.

"Precisely. A teaching-machine," resumed the Countess. "But I don't want one. I wish Alice's governess, whoever she may be, to be a good sensible young woman, such as Miss Grainger was; and instead of that, all my correspondents write to me of the degrees and diplomas that have been taken out by those they recommend. I suppose I am an old-fashioned person, but I do wish"——

But before the Countess of Wolverhampton could complete her discourse on the governess topic, the door was jerked open, and the old butler, who had permitted himself to turn the handle for once with such unconventional

vivacity, stood gasping in the doorway with a face as white as his cravat.

“Why, Bugles!” began the Countess, rising in alarm; for that an ox should talk, as Livy tells us that a Roman representative of the bovine genus actually did, is scarcely more calculated to disturb the nerves than that a well-trained servant should crack the ice of his artificial decorum. The Earl, who was, like his wife, a partisan of old fashions, was lingering over his wine in the dining-room, and might of course be ill. Apoplexy was the first thought that rose, like a sheeted spectre, before the Countess’s mind.

“Fire, my lady! Fire at High Tor; broke out sudden; and all the village is in flames!” panted out Bugles the butler, who was fat and short of breath. And without were to

be vaguely heard other voices and the sound of running feet, and the cry, alarming above all others, of 'Fire! fire!' as grooms and gardeners forgot their usual respectful reticence in the first flush of the anticipated struggle with the direst foe of man and his works.

"There really is a fire, and I'm afraid a great one, to judge by the smoke and the sparks," said Lord Harrogate, who at this juncture entered. "My father has had his horse saddled already, and has started by this time for the village, and I am going too of course. I only came first to see if"——

"If we were ready to come too!" cried Lady Maud. "To be sure we will, the moment we can get our hats, Gladys and I. Alice will stay with mamma. We can't

work at putting out the fire, but we may be of use somehow."

And in an incredibly short space of time the Ladies De Vere and their brother were hurrying down the steep road that led to the scene of the disaster. High Tor House, isolated and on a lofty spot of rising ground, was in no sort of peril from the fire raging beneath; but the indwellers of the great mansion were not disposed, like the divinities of the Pagan Olympus, serenely to contemplate the woes of the inhabitants of earth, and without waiting for orders, nearly every boy and man in the Earl's employ had hastened down to fight the common foe.

"The dry weather—unusually dry for this moist district, where the last thing we generally have to complain of is the want

of rain—must help the fire sadly,” said Lord Harrogate, as the lodge-gates were left behind, and the lurid light of the conflagration became more and more distinctly visible through gaps in the high hedges that bordered the road. As they drew nearer, the eddyng clouds of smoke, mingled with fiery dots here and there, the dull crimson glow, and the smothered sound of voices mingled with the roar of the flames and the clang of labour, gave unpleasant tokens of the mischief that was going on.

“I hoped at the first that the report was an exaggerated one, as most reports are,” said Lord Harrogate, as they came in sight of the burning houses. “But this is an ugly business. It is on one side of the street only, by good luck, that the fire

is raging, and if we can keep it from spreading"——

The crash of a cottage roof tumbling in, and followed by a shower of sparks and small fragments of flaming wood, drowned the rest of the sentence. Matters were evidently bad enough, though not quite so bad as might have been augured from the first announcement of that herald of misfortune, Bugles the butler. The whole southern side of the long straggling street was more or less in flames; and to keep the fire from communicating itself to the houses on the opposite side of the road was a work which in itself taxed the strength of the whole adult male population to the utmost.

The noise, the smoke, the falling sparks,

and the occasional plumping down into the dust of the road of some half-consumed scrap of woodwork, made Lord Harrogate's sisters, who were physically no braver than the average of their sex, shrink back aghast.

"Here, Maud!" cried her brother impatiently. "We must not—or I must not—be drones in the hive. You know most of these good people—Mrs. Prosser, for instance.—Mrs. Prosser, my sisters will stay with you while I go forward to bear a hand in getting the fire under.—Where's my father? Ah, there he is, in the thick of the smoke!"

And there, sure enough, was dimly to be seen the well-known figure of the old Earl giving orders to such as were cool enough to hearken to them, whilst his frightened horse, held by a groom, stood at some

distance. Darting through the clouds of suffocating vapour, which were dense enough to suggest the idea of a battle, Lord Harrogate reached the place where his father was standing.

“I don’t see any fire-engines!” exclaimed the young man, looking with a sort of dismay at the chain of buckets passed from hand to hand. “What, in the name of all that’s wonderful, are the people dreaming of?”

“We have sent to Pebworth for help,” said the Earl, shaking his gray head; “but before any arrives, if the wind freshens the houses will be mere cinder-heaps. As for the parish engine, Stickles here has got the same story to tell that is only too common among us in England here.”

And Stickles, who was the clerk, rubbed his hands apologetically together as he faltered out, in reply to Lord Harrogate's impatient question, the excuses which he had previously addressed to the Earl. The engine of which he was official custodian had been long out of repair, and was to have been 'seen to,' and should have been 'seen to' after harvest-time, had not the unfortunate outbreak of a very real and practical fire tested the unreadiness of the precautions for putting it out. As it was, the only available means of doing battle with the conflagration was the rude and simple one of flinging water on the flames, and at this task the inhabitants were busy enough. They were busier, however, before long, as, under the direction of Lord Harro-

gate, whom they respected, they began to tear down some portions of the burning buildings, in the hope of preventing the fire from spreading. A strange sight it was which the village street presented, encumbered as it was by chests and bedding and the poor furniture which had been hastily dragged out from the doors of cottages now blazing, and the wailing of frightened children, and the shrill voices of the women, blended with the hoarse deep roar of the triumphant flames.

"'Tis a mercy, my Lord, it broke out when it did," said Charley Joyce, best bowler in the local cricket club and best woodman in the Earl's employment, and in both of these capacities well known to the Earl's heir. "There'd ha' been a lot

of us burned in our beds, if it had tarried till after midnight. All came," he added, "of that blessed rock-oil from Ameriky."

Such indeed was the reported origin of the disaster. A girl, for milking purposes, had taken a tin lamp with her into a cow-shed; the cow had kicked over the lamp, and the burning petroleum had set fire to the straw litter, whence the flames had mounted to the thatched roof. Thatched roofs, picturesque to look upon, were only too numerous for safety in that West-country village. The fire had crawled and darted, lithe as a serpent, from gable to porch, and from paling to stable.

"There! Look at the school-house now!" cried a score of voices; and indeed the flames were pouring outwards through the

shattered windows and licking the blackened walls, and withering to charred sticks the pretty hedge where the fragrant woodbine had clung so lovingly to the quickset, and scorching the very flowers in the garden.

"The fire began near about there," remarked Joyce; but Lord Harrogate was already out of ear-shot, since his keen eye had caught a glimpse of a pale beautiful face, in the midst of the confusion of the crowded street. He pushed his way through the excited throng.

"You are not hurt, Miss Gray, I hope and trust?" he said with an eagerness that surprised himself.

"No; but my house is burning," said Ethel in reply; "and I am a stranger,

and —— But pray, my Lord, do not trouble yourself to"—— For the young man had drawn her arm gently but firmly through his.

"You must let me choose for you," he said. "My sisters are here, close by, at Mrs. Prosser's, who keeps the village shop—a kind motherly old soul. I must leave you with them."

Thus Ethel allowed herself to be led to the place where, amidst a knot of women, whose awe-stricken faces told how great was their interest in the spectacle, the Ladies De Vere stood watching the progress of the fire. Lord Harrogate did not linger for an instant, but went back to put heart into the men still battling with the encroaching flames.

It was no trifle, this hand-to-hand combat, as it were, with the fire; the fierce heat driving back the volunteers who ventured very near to the tottering walls to fling water upon the blazing timbers, while the blinding smoke rushed volleying out to blear the eyes and clog the lungs of the workers, and ever and anon some tall chimney or breached roof would fall with a crash, sending showers of bricks and half-consumed wood into the midst of the crowd; and hairbreadth escapes were many, and bruises numerous.

At last, however, the two engines from Pebworth came clattering into the street, and water being in that region of streams ready to hand, and the wind happily abating, the fire was fairly conquered, and

all further danger at an end. There was no loss of life ; but some were singed and many bruised ; while thirty humble homes had been turned to heaps of smouldering ruin, and household gear and clothing, snatched from the flames, formed piles here and there in the wet road. Gradually the hospitality of this or that neighbour afforded temporary shelter to the crying children, the lamenting women, and the exhausted men ; while a flying squadron of boys chased and led back captive the cows and pigs, the fowls and donkeys of those whose yards and sheds had been made desolate by the conflagration.

But what was Ethel to do ? The old dame who served her had been readily received into the dwelling of a neighbour ;

and indeed nearly all of those so suddenly evicted had kindred, and all had friends to harbour them at this pinch. The young school-mistress looked forlorn indeed, as she stood alone in the midst of so many groups of voluble talkers.

"You must come home with us, Miss Gray," said Lady Maud kindly; "must come up to High Tor House, I mean," she added, seeing that Ethel did not at first appear to comprehend her words, "and stay with us until something can be done. It is the least we can do for you, burned out of house and home in this dreadful way, as you have been."

Lady Gladys heartily seconded the invitation; but Ethel still hesitated until the Earl drew near.

“ I have been telling Miss Gray here, papa, that we will take care of her at the House for a few days till she can look about her,” said Lady Maud.

“ Quite right, my dear,” answered the Earl with his fatherly smile ; and thus the matter was settled.

CHAPTER III.

AS GOVERNESS.

THE establishment at High Tor was by no means on so sumptuous a scale as that which the much larger revenues of Sir Sykes Denzil maintained at Carbery Chase. Indeed, while for a baronet Sir Sykes was rich, for an earl Lord Wolverhampton was almost poor. There are poorer earls than he, no doubt, dwelling in cheap watering-places or in outlying London squares, and exhibiting their pearl-studded coronets on no more pretentious equipage than a brougham. But for a man of his degree, and a De

Vere withal, the Earl was not wealthy. It was much to his credit that he was popular in spite of the comparative slenderness of his annual rent-roll, since a poor lord, like an impoverished government, is apt to be regarded with a sort of unreasoning contempt by those who are very likely worse off, but in a less conspicuous station.

To be rich is, after all, a very uncertain distinction; that which is opulence to the Squire implying mere substantial comfort when it belongs to Sir John, and but a moderate income when it has to meet the calls which charity, duty, and custom make on 'my lord's' bank balance. Are there not nobles of princely rank who declare that they are stinted of pocket-

money, of actual jingling sovereigns and rustling notes, by the prudent administrators of their vast nominal fortunes? And have we not heard of mighty financiers who feel a positive pang at any encroachment on the colossal capital on which is reared the fabric of a world-wide credit?

Lord Wolverhampton had been known to say more than once among his intimate friends, that a step in the peerage would to him prove a ruinous boon; and that to keep his head above water, difficult as an Earl, would be impossible were that honest head overweighted by the strawberry-leaved coronet of a Marquis. Such expensive promotion was, however, unlikely, for High Tor now sent forth no legislators to the more stirring of the Houses of Parliament. Some

two years before, Lord Harrogate had been returned for a west-country borough, and had earned some praise and much good-will during the brief tenure of his seat. But the session came to a close, and with it the corporate life of the moribund House of Commons; and the Earl could not bring himself again to face the costly struggle of a contested election, even on behalf of a son so promising as his heir.

Thus the fine old house of High Tor, though lacking no adjuncts or appliances that should appertain to the mansion of a plain country gentleman who happened to have a handle to his name (such was the Earl's favourite way of describing himself among those who knew him well, though it may be doubted whether any

patrician in Europe cherished in secret a stronger sentiment of family pride), was not kept up with quite so ostentatious a lavishness as the neighbouring dwelling of Carbery, the red gables of which gleaming in the westering sun, never met Lord Wolverhampton's eyes without suggesting the remembrance that it had been built and, till recently, owned by a De Vere.

There was space enough and to spare in the picturesque old mansion ; and the chamber which had been assigned to Ethel Gray, and which had been formerly tenanted by that Miss Grainger whose desertion of her post as governess to try the experiment of wedded life we have heard the Countess deplore, and which was next to the great rambling school-room, commanded a noble

prospect over hill and dale, over wood and water. From the ivy-framed windows, in clear weather, Dartmoor might be seen for miles and leagues, rolling away in giant waves of purple heather and gray and green ; while here and there rose up defiantly the naked crags, known locally as Tors, frowning like natural fortresses on the invader of the wilderness.

Nearer, the two parks were visible, with all their wealth of huge old trees and matchless turf, browsed by hereditary deer, that couched contentedly amid the tall fern that had screened the antlered herds for centuries past, and the red roof and gleaming vanes of stately Carbery, and the peaceful waters of its ornamental lake, in which the silver-white swans that floated there were imaged

back as from the polished surface of a mirror. It was a pretty room this, wherein Miss Grainger, its last occupant, had passed perhaps the happiest years of her governess-life; and now it had received a new tenant in the person of Ethel Gray. A new tenant, but for how long? That was a question which Ethel asked herself, without being able to give a satisfactory answer to her own query. The school-house of High Tor, with the modest dwelling of its mistress, lay in ugly heaps of blackened ruin; and it must be long before the little flock of scholars could again be gathered together in any building large enough to hold them, and longer before the village instructress could have a home to replace that which the fire had made desolate. There were at the

best of times no lodgings in High Tor fit for the abode of an educated girl such as Ethel, and now every house that remained unharmed was over-crowded by the burned-out inhabitants of those which the conflagration had swept away.

It so chanced, however, that on the very day following Ethel's arrival the question as to the prolongation of her sojourn at High Tor House was conclusively settled. Lady Alice, a quick-witted impulsive child, came swiftly down-stairs to the room where her mother and sisters were sitting. "Pray, come, Maud!" she said breathlessly; "Gladys, you come too; and you, mamma. It's worth while, indeed it is, only to listen for a moment!"

"What is to be listened to?" asked the

Countess, amused at the eager manner of her youngest child.

"Miss Gray's singing, her wonderful, wonderful singing!" returned the child impetuously. "I heard it by accident as I passed the door of the school-room, where she is all alone at the piano; and I could hardly tear myself away, that I might tell you not to lose the treat."

The Countess laughed good-humouredly.

"All Alice's geese are swans," she said, "and I am too old to climb so many stairs on the strength of this young lady's recommendation. You are young, Maud, yourself, and I see you cannot resist the temptation; nor you either, Gladys."

And indeed the two elder of the Ladies De Vere had allowed themselves to be con-

vinced, or at least rendered compliant, by the pleading eyes and the energetic 'Do come, please,' of their child-sister. It was some little time before they returned.

"Mamma, Alice was right ; and you have lost a treat worth a longer pilgrimage than that," said frank Lady Gladys, coming down, with Alice, radiant with delight, skipping at her side. "This Miss Gray (Maud, who is really getting fond of her, addresses her as 'Ethel' already) has a voice that might make her fortune if she were less timid, and so sweet and liquid that one might fancy it the carol of a bird. Such a touch, too, on the keys ! That jangling wheezy old school-room piano, on which excellent Miss Grainger used to pound so distressingly, gives out real music beneath those fingers of hers, and

becomes full-toned and mellow. What a shame to throw away talent such as that upon the A B C work of teaching urchins the rudiments of knowledge !”

“I never heard of these high musical attainments of Miss Gray’s, I am sure,” said the puzzled Countess ; “and I am almost as certain that your father never heard of them either. She was strongly recommended, I know, by an old college friend of my lord, a clergyman somewhere, and that is all I have learned concerning her. But if she is such a performer as you describe, I should like to hear her too.”

Lady Gladys shook her head. “I am not sure,” she said, “whether so shy a song-bird can be coaxed into warbling before an audience of strangers. She really did seem

quite startled and distressed when Alice began to clap her hands, and Maud and I broke in upon her. She had no notion, she said, that her singing could be heard by any of us in that out-of-the-way corner of so large a house, and seemed to think she had taken a great liberty and infringed rules of social decorum. And it was all that even Maud, whom she likes, could do to persuade her to sing again, only a little bit of a ballad ; but it all but brought tears into my eyes, hackneyed girl of the world as I am, you know."

In explanation of which last speech, it may be mentioned that Lady Gladys, the beauty of the family, had gone through two London seasons under the chaperonage of her mother's sister, the Marchioness of

Plinlimmon, and that it was supposed that if she had remained unmarried still, it was not for want of offers matrimonial.

“I was thinking, mamma,” said Lady Maud, who had lingered longer with Ethel than her sister had done, “that you could scarcely do better than to engage Miss Gray, if it suits her, as a governess for Alice, instead of writing to every point of the compass in hopes that some friend will recommend some treasure. It’s not only that Ethel Gray is really too good for the routine of plodding tuition in a village school, but that she knows everything, or nearly everything, that Miss Grainger knew, and French and German quite as well as it is possible to acquire them in England. Gladys has told you, I am sure, what a musician she

is. I do not know how you could do better."

The Countess too did not know how she could do better than to engage such a successor to the oft-quoted Miss Grainger, provided she possessed the accomplishments with which she was credited, and were willing—which Lady Wolverhampton could scarcely doubt—to exchange her rustic pupils for the post of governess at High Tor House. And as, on inquiry, it seemed that Ethel's acquirements had not been overrated, and that her magnificent voice and musical proficiency fully merited the encomiums of the girls, while Alice was a vehement partisan of the governess elect, the Countess was ready to propose the formal installation of Ethel in that capacity, subject to 'my

lord's' approval, when he should return from some magisterial business at Pebworth.

It was, however, necessary, in the Countess's opinion, to ask a question or two on other matters than that of competence to teach. The office of mistress of the village school was one thing; that of governess to an Earl's youngest daughter was another. It would be satisfactory, the Countess thought, to know a little more of Miss Gray's birth, parentage, and antecedents than any of the De Vere family did as yet know. Ethel's simple frankness saved Lady Wolverhampton—who did not like to put direct questions, and was eminently unfit for the delicate operation of extracting by subtle talk and veiled inquiry what she wished to learn—a great deal of trouble.

"My father is in Australia," she said, raising her clear eyes to meet those of the Countess. "He is, I believe, a merchant there; but even *that* I do not know with any certainty, though he has been living there for many years, and I have always been told that I was born in the colony. I came with him to England, I know, when I was a little child, and he returned there; and I have not seen him since then, and cannot remember him at all."

Ethel's story was a brief one. She had little to relate, save of her early youth, spent at Sandston, a minor bathing-place on the Norfolk coast, where Mr. Gray, a widower, who had paid but a short visit to his native country, had left his only child under the care of an excellent woman, one Mrs. Linklater,

a widow and mistress of a lodging-house. Ethel's eyes grew dim as she spoke of good motherly Mrs. Linklater, at whose death, three years before, she had been received into the house of the clergyman, who had been a college friend of the Earl, and to whose wife she had been a sort of companion.

"Dear Mrs. Keating," said Ethel simply, "quite, I am afraid, spoiled me. For years and years, when Mrs. Linklater was alive, I spent much of my time at the vicarage; and Mrs. Keating, who was herself very accomplished, taught me almost all the little that I know. She was fond of music, and understood it as few understand it, and it is through her kindness that I learned to sing and play. She had no children living

except the three sons who were making their way in the world ; and I believe that she thought I was like a little daughter she had lost, and whose name, like mine, was Ethel, and so "——

"And so she took you to live with her when this worthy Mrs.—yes, Linklater died," said the Countess encouragingly. "But how came you to leave her?"

Ethel's explanation of that was clear enough. Mrs. Keating's health, always frail, had given way, and she had been ordered to a warmer climate. Dr. Keating, who had accompanied his wife to Mentone and Bellaggio, had a curate to pay and heavy expenses to meet. It was necessary that Ethel should get her own living ; and it was at her own suggestion that Dr.



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Keating had sought for her that appointment as mistress of a village school which his acquaintance with the Earl had enabled him to obtain for her at High Tor.

“But your father?” said the Countess, full of sympathy, for she liked the girl better and better for all that she saw or heard of her. Ethel smiled somewhat sadly. Mr. Gray, it appeared, seldom wrote, and then very curtly, from Australia. For nearly two years the customary remittance, sufficient to defray the cost of his daughter’s maintenance, had not reached Sandston. That he would one day come back to England, Ethel hoped. He had been, she feared, of late less prosperous in his affairs than was formerly the case. Dr. Keating held the address in Sydney to which

letters to the widower had been hitherto addressed.

The matter was settled; the proposal that Ethel should become governess to Lady Alice, and as such should be permanently domiciled at High Tor, was graciously made and gratefully accepted.

"I shall have to look for another school-mistress, it seems," said the good-natured old Earl; "but never mind that. Alice is pleased, and Maud is pleased; and as Miss Gray seems to like it too, I think we may say that some good came of our luckless fire, after all."

CHAPTER IV.

ETHEL FINDS A FRIEND.

"It was all one property once," said Lady Maud, as she sat by Ethel's side in the open window of the school-room, while Ethel's pupil, Lady Alice, was busily engaged in copying a sketch. The window commanded across the park a view of Carbery, with its Elizabethan gables and vanes glinting back the sun. Lady Maud was fond of spending her spare hours in the society of the new governess, and she and Ethel were, in spite of the difference of their position, fast friends.

"It is seldom," said Ethel Gray, "that two such grand houses are so close together."

"They belonged, as I said, to one owner," returned Lady Maud; "and the builder of Carbery was a De Vere and lived at High Tor, long ago. He was an ancestor of ours; but I don't know exactly how it was that the properties came to be divided. I do know how Sir Sykes came to be master of the Chase; and if you like, I will tell you the story. It is no secret. I wonder that none of the village gossips have been beforehand with me."

"I always imagined Sir Sykes to be a relation of yours," said Ethel, with another glance at the stately mansion, gleaming in the mellow sunshine.

"No more than you are, dear," answered

Lady Maud; "and indeed he never could have expected to be the owner of that fine place, when he was a boy. He was poor enough. His father, old Sir Harbottle, had been a sad spendthrift, and died abroad; and when Sir Sykes, then a captain of infantry, came back from India, he had nothing to inherit but the baronetcy. They are Yorkshire people, the Denzils, not Devonshire; but there was a connection by marriage between Sir Sykes and old Lord Harrogate, who had married Sir Harbottle's sister.

"This old Lord Harrogate was the master of Carbery Chase, and a kinsman of ours, and head of all the De Veres; but how, I cannot exactly tell you, for we titled people, I suspect, often remember as little of our

pedigree as if our names were Jones or Robinson. I only know that he was a rich, lonely, furious-tempered old man, a widower without any children or nephews, and had quarrelled with all his relations, with Papa most of all, about some tiresome election business. They say lords are forbidden by law to meddle with elections, but they do meddle ; and the Earl went on one side, and old Lord Harrogate, who was of different politics, on the other. The end of it was that Sir Sykes was sent for, and that Lord Harrogate made his will, giving every acre to his wife's nephew ; just, as he said, that no De Vere should be the better for his death.

“What was the oddest thing of all,” pursued Lady Maud, “was that the old

Lord did not like Sir Sykes at all, and told him so, they say; but made him his heir exactly because he thought it would be gall and wormwood to his own kith and kin. And it was supposed that Lord Harrogate's anger and violent emotions brought on the fatal fit of apoplexy by which he was carried off. At any rate he died suddenly only a few hours after the signing of the will; and that was how Sir Sykes became master of Carbery."

"I should not think it could have made him very happy," said Ethel thoughtfully.

"I am sure I don't know why it should not," said the more practical Lady Maud. "It was no fault of his, after all, that Lord Harrogate had the whim to will it away as he did; and Papa owed him no grudge for

it; and we have always been on neighbourly terms, if not very intimate. But it did not make him happy. Sir Sykes," she added laughingly, "had, you must know, a most romantic love-affair in his youth, unlikely as such a thing seems to those who see him now."

Ethel Gray asked, with more interest than before, if it were Sir Sykes Denzil's love-affair which had prevented his enjoying the material prosperity which was his.

"I have always thought so," said Lady Maud confidently; "though people ascribe his sad looks and retired life to a different cause. But there is no doubt that he was very much in love with a certain Miss De Vere, an exceedingly pretty girl, whom Papa and Mamma always speak of as Cousin

Clare, and whose picture I will shew you this evening, if you like, in the Green Room. Cousin Clare was an orphan, with no money, and she lived in Papa's house when he was first married; and poor as she was, she was to be Lady Harrogate when the old Lord died."

"I thought your brother"—— said Ethel wonderingly.

"O yes; it has come to us now, the title," said Lady Maud, smiling. "But Miss Clare De Vere, who was a distant cousin, came next in succession, and was to have the Barony, and be a peeress in her own right, when the old Lord died. Harrogate is one of the oldest English titles, and goes, as they call it, to heirs-female; so that it was a standing joke that poor Miss De Vere

would be a peeress without income enough to pay her milliner ; only every one hoped she would marry well, since she was very lovely, as I told you. Now Sir Sykes was desperately in love with her ; but the Earl did not approve of his suit, nor did Mamma, for he was badly off and in debt, and had been married before."

"I did not know that. I noticed Lady Denzil's monument in the church only a month ago," rejoined Ethel.

"That was the second wife," said Lady Maud. "Jasper and the girls were not her children. No. Sir Sykes married very young, when a subaltern in India, and there his wife died ; and when he came home a widower, he had these three children to provide for, and scarcely any means at

all. He was a handsome man—that I think one can see. But Cousin Clare did not like him; still she was of a gentle yielding nature, and when Sir Sykes became owner of Carbery, and a very good match indeed, and Papa thought Clare had better accept him, somehow she allowed herself to be talked into an engagement. Well, the baronet was very urgent, and he had got the Earl and Countess on his side; and poor Cousin Clare I'm afraid was not very strong-minded, so she promised to marry Sir Sykes; though the man she really cared for was a needy cousin of hers and ours, Colonel Edward De Vere of the Guards; and the wedding things were all got ready, and the lawyers had drawn the settlements; when, to the sur-

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prise of all, Cousin Clare was missing. She had eloped with her cousin Edward, and was married to him in Scotland."

"Sir Sykes must have felt that very much?" said Ethel, looking across the park towards the distant mansion of Carbery.

"He did," returned Lady Maud. "But I don't pity him, because, as you shall hear, he behaved very ill. It was Papa who broke the news to him; and I have heard the Earl say that the passion of uncontrolled rage with which he received it was absolutely horrible. Some anger was natural of course; but he was more like a fiend than a man. He swore that he would be revenged; that he would never rest until he had found some means of stabbing Clare's heart, as she had stabbed his, and of making

her bitterly rue the day when she had cast him off. He was, in fact, dreadfully violent, and it seemed the more shocking in a polite smooth-spoken man like him ; but of course people excused him on account of the excitement of his feelings.

“ Men who are jilted do odd things, they say. In half a year after Clare’s elopement, Sir Sykes married a Manchester heiress with a large fortune ; and three years later the second Lady Denzil died at Tunbridge Wells ; and soon after, her only child, a little girl of about three years old, died too. From that time it was that Sir Sykes’s melancholy was supposed to date. It was supposed that he never got over the loss of this baby daughter, and that was the odder, because he seemed the very last man to mourn

always over a little child. It was not the loss of his wife; he cared very little for her. And he never seemed a devoted father to his surviving children. Yet since that tiny mite of a girl was buried, he never held up his head as he had been used to do."

"And Miss Clare, Miss De Vere?" asked Ethel, with a feminine interest in the heroine of the story.

"Ah! poor Cousin Clare!" said Lady Maud seriously: "she suffered enough, poor thing, to expiate her breach of faith to Sir Sykes tenfold. Very, very short was her time of happy married life before"—

"I wish, Maud, please, you would look at this sketch for me, and help me with the foreground. I've made the figures too big,

I'm afraid, and can't get in the rest of it," said young Lady Alice, from amid her pencils and colour-boxes.

"I will; I'll come and try what I can make of it, as soon as I have told Miss Gray the rest of the story—the saddest part of it, I am sorry to say," said good-natured Lady Maud. "Sir Sykes's vengeance was realized, terribly realized, without his having to stir a finger in the matter, for little more than three years after Cousin Clare's marriage, her husband, whom she almost idolized, was brought home to the house a corpse. He had, like many other heroes both in romance and reality, been thrown from his horse in the hunting-field and killed on the spot.

"The young Baroness Harrogate—I have

already told you that Clare was heir-female to the title at the death of the old Lord—was all but killed too, as I have heard, by the shock of her husband's death; but for the sake of her child, the only earthly consolation left to her, the poor thing bore up under her great affliction. Yet Papa said that when he went to see her, her mournful eyes quite haunted him for weeks and months afterwards, and that, beautiful as she still was, she looked but the ghost of her former self. Then, when the next summer came round—— I hardly like to tell it!" said Lady Maud, as the tears rose thickly in her eyes.

"Do not tell me any more," said Ethel gently, "if it gives you pain."

"No; I was foolish," returned her friend,

smiling; "for what I am speaking of happened long, long ago, when you and I were in the nursery, and I have heard it related very often, though I never told it until to-day. Well, the young widow lived on in the house she had inhabited since the first days of her marriage, a pretty cottage beside the Thames, and there she dwelt alone with her child, a sweet little creature, a girl of three years of age, who promised to be nearly as beautiful as her beautiful mother. And then this last hope was snatched away."

"Did the child die?" asked Ethel falteringly.

"It was worse than that," answered Lady Maud, whose lip trembled as she spoke. "She had been with the child in the garden,

which bordered the river. Little Helena—that was her name—was playing among the flowers when her mother was called away, and as she was entering the house, she heard a faint cry or scream, in what seemed to be the child's voice. She ran back to the garden, and to the grassy terrace where she had left her young treasure ; but the child was not to be seen. She called ; but there was no answer. Trembling, she neared the water's edge, and there she saw the child's tiny straw-hat with its broad black ribbon, floating down the river ; but of the body—for no one could doubt but that the poor little lamb had been drowned—there were no signs ; and when aid was summoned and a search begun, it proved fruitless."

"Was the poor little child never found

then?" asked Ethel, more moved than she expected to be by these details.

"Never found," replied Lady Maud. "No rewards, no entreaties availed, though men examined every creek and shoal of the river. No trace of the lost one was ever discovered, except the little straw-hat. With that the miserable young mother never would part. On her own death-bed—and she died very soon after, utterly broken down by this double bereavement—it was the last object on which her dying eyes looked as her feeble fingers clung to it, that little hat of the child's. We talk lightly of broken hearts. And yet, such things can be. Poor Cousin Clare died of one. Hers was a sad, sad story."

Both Lady Maud and Ethel were weeping

now. The former was the first to dry her eyes.

"We are very silly," she said, trying to smile, "to cry in this way over an old history concerning people that we never, to our knowledge, saw ; for though I was alive when Cousin Clare married, I don't remember her at all. I was too young for that. Only it struck me often that Sir Sykes Denzil's sadness may have more to do with the desertion of his betrothed bride and her brief career and early ending, than with the cause to which it is generally assigned. Don't you think so too ?"

Ethel did think so ; but she did not speak for a moment, and then she said : "I pity Sir Sykes too. How bitterly his own cruel words, as to the revenge he threatened, must

have come back to his memory when he heard the news of that great misfortune—of the child's being drowned."

"Idle threats, dear! Perhaps he hardly remembered having spoken so foolishly in his excitement," answered Lady Maud indifferently. "It was after all about that time that he lost his own little daughter. Cousin Clare's title came to Papa, and our brother Harrogate bears it by courtesy, as you know. There was no property. The poor little child, had she lived, would have been Helena, Lady Harrogate."

"The body was never found at all?" asked Ethel.

"Never found!" said Lady Maud.—"Now Alice, I'll help you with your drawing." And the conversation ceased.

CHAPTER V.

ARCADES AMBO.

HOT, dusty, and conventionally empty as London now was, and stifling as was the confined air of St. Nicholas Poultney, Mr. Enoch Wilkins was in gay good-humour. He showed it by the urbanity with which he was dismissing a shabby-genteel man of middle age, to whose remonstrances he had listened with a bland semi-serious patience unusual to him.

“Now, really, Mr. Greening, really, we must have no more of this,” he said, shewing his white front teeth in an affable smile.

“ ‘Can’t pay’ and ‘Won’t pay’ are, I fancy, convertible phrases. The Loan Office cannot afford to do business on sentimental principles. And it’s all very well to say that you only had in cash nine seven eleven, as consideration for your notes of hand amounting to—let me see.” And the solicitor glanced at a bundle of papers on the table.

“To twenty-eight pounds six and fourpence,” said the debtor piteously; “two-thirds of which are for interest and commission.”

“But that,” pursued the solicitor, “by no means affects the legal aspect of the case. The bill of sale over your furniture is none the less valid. I didn’t quite catch your last remark.—Ah! to sell you up would be, to you, sheer ruin? Then, my

good Mr. Greening, I advise you to stave off the ruin by prompt payment, to escape the very heavy expenses to which you will otherwise be put. Good-day to you.—Now,” he added to his clerk, “I will see this Mr. Hold.” And as the impecunious Greening took his melancholy leave, the sunburnt countenance of Richard Hold became visible in the doorway.

“From abroad, I presume?” said Mr. Wilkins affably, as his observant eye noted the seafaring aspect of his visitor and the bronze on his cheek, which might well have become a successful Australian digger, fresh with his dust and nuggets from the gold-fields.

“Well—I have been abroad; I have knocked about the world a goodish bit,”

answered Hold slowly, "but just latterly I've stayed ashore."

Mr. Wilkins picked up the office penknife and tapped the table with the buckhorn handle of it somewhat impatiently. He did not entertain quite so high an opinion of the swarthy stranger as before. The first glance had suggested damages in a running-down case at sea; the second, some claim for salvage; the third, an investment of savings earned, according to the picturesque phrase, 'where the gold grows.' But the solicitor knew life well enough to be aware that those who have knocked, in Hold's words, about the world, are rolling stones whereon seldom grows the moss of profit.

"What, Mr. Hold, may be your business with me?" he asked curtly.

Richard Hold was not in the least nettled at this chilling reception. His dark roving eyes made their survey of the lawyer's surroundings, from the heavy silver inkstand to the prints on the walls, and then settled on the face of Mr. Enoch Wilkins himself.

"That depends," said Hold, with a lazy good-humour, as he leaned against the doorpost nearest to him, "on what you call business, skipper !"

Mr. Wilkins frowned ; but the words, sharp and peremptory, that rose to his lips, remained unspoken. His first idea had been that this was the saucy freak of an ill-conditioned sailor, and that a word to his clerk and a summons to the policeman on his beat hard by, would rid him of the intruder. But the man was quite sober.

There must be some reason for his singular tone and bearing. Wherefore, when Mr. Wilkins spoke again, it was urbanely enough: "If I can be of use to you professionally, sir, you may command me; at least I shall be glad to hear what you have got to say. Perhaps you feel somewhat strange in a lawyer's office?"

"I haven't seen the inside of one since six years ago I was in trouble at Singapore about—never mind what!" returned Hold, checking his too communicative flow of words, and then added: "Now I hail from Devonshire—Dartmoor way—Carbery Chase way, not to mince matters."

Mr. Wilkins started. "Have you a message for me—from Sir Sykes, I mean?" he inquired, in an altered voice.

"No!" replied Hold, in a dubious tone, and coughing expressively behind his broad brown hand; "not exactly that."

The lawyer looked keenly at his visitor. Hold's bold eyes met his. The man's unabashed confident air was not lost on so shrewd an observer of human nature as was Enoch Wilkins. "Take a chair, I beg, Mr. Hold," he said civilly; and Hold took a chair, placed it sideways, and seating himself upon it in a careless informal attitude, rested one elbow on the chair-back, and contemplated the lawyer with serene scrutiny.

"You come from Sir Sykes, however, although you do not bring a message?" asked Mr. Wilkins.

"Take your affidavit of that, squire!"

returned Hold, in an assured tone. "We ought to be friends, you and I," he added, with what was meant for an engaging smile, "for we are both, I reckon, in the same boat."

"In the same boat, hey?" repeated Mr. Wilkins cautiously. "How's that?"

"I mean," said Hold, knitting his black brows, "that we are both pretty much on the same lay—that we know a thing or two about a rich party that shall be nameless, and about certain old scores, and a certain young lady, and—— Why should I do all the chat, master? Is this Greek to you, or do you catch my meaning?"

Mr. Wilkins, whose eyes had opened very widely as he listened, here started as though he had been electrified. "I understand you

to imply," he said smoothly, "that our interests are identical?"

"Well, I guess they are," responded Hold, in the blunt fashion that was natural to him. "We both, I suppose, want as many of Sir Sykes Denzil's yellow coins as we can conjure out of his pocket; and both need no teaching to turn the screw pretty smartly when we see our way to it; eh, mister?"

Enoch Wilkins, gentleman, winced before this over-candid home-thrust. It is indeed one thing to be guilty of a particular act and another to hear it defined with unmannerly plainness of speech. And he did not quite like the being bracketed, as to his motives and position, with a piratical-looking fellow, such as he saw Hold to be.

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Why should we two fall out so long as Sir Sykes Denzil, Baronet, is good for this kind of thing?" And the ruffian imitated, in expressive pantomime, the action of squeezing a sponge.

Again the lawyer laughed. "No need," he said with well-feigned admiration for the other's astuteness, "to send *your* wits to the whetstone, Mr.—or perhaps I should say Captain—Hold."

"Well, I don't dislike the handle to my name; and I've a fairish right to it, since I've had my own cuddy and my own quarter-deck," rejoined Hold boastfully. "And now, squire, I'd like to hear your views a little more explicit out than I have had the pleasure."

It was the attorney's turn to cough now,

as he replied, still swaying his watch-guard to and fro: "There you push me, my good sir, into a corner. Every profession has its point of honour, you know; and we lawyers are shy of talking over the affairs of an absent client unless"——

"Client, you call him, do you?" broke in Hold. "Maybe you're correct there, since you've brought the Bart. to throw Pounce and Pontifex overboard, and make you first-officer over his tenants; but he warn't a client before yesterday."

The astonishment written in Mr. Wilkin's face was very genuine. Of all the extraordinary confidants whom Sir Sykes could have selected, surely this coarse fierce adventurer was the most unlikely. And yet how, save from Sir Sykes himself,

could the fellow have acquired his knowledge of the truth ?

“ I was not prepared ”—— stammered out the lawyer.

“ Not prepared,” interrupted Hold coolly, “ to find a rough diamond like yours to command, so deep in the Bart.’s little secrets. Perhaps not. Mind ye, I don’t want to quarrel. Live and let live. But it’s good sometimes to fire a shotted gun athwart a stranger’s bows, d’ye see ? ”

“ You and Sir Sykes are old acquaintances ? ” said the lawyer, feeling his way.

“ Pretty well for that. Years too have gone by a few since you and he first came within hailing distance,” replied Hold with assumed carelessness.

“ We were younger men, that’s certain,”

returned the lawyer with a jolly laugh and a twinkling eye. That anybody should try to extract from him, Enoch Wilkins, information that he desired to keep to himself—to pump him, in homely phraseology, seemed to the attorney of St. Nicholas Poultney, in the light of an exquisitely subtle joke. Hold, in spite of his confidence in his own shrewdness, began to entertain vague doubts as to whether in a fair field he was quite a match for the London solicitor. Fortune, however, had dealt him a handful of court-cards, and he proceeded to improve the occasion.

“Now, squire,” said Hold impressively, and laying one brawny hand, as if to enforce the argument, on the table as he spoke, “I could, if I chose, clap a match to the powder-magazine and blow the whole concern

sky-high. Suppose I weren't well used among ye? Suppose I began to meet cold looks and buttoned-up pockets? What easier than to make a clean breast of what it no longer pays to keep secret, stand the consequences—I've stood worse on the Antipodes' side of the world—and get another sniff of blue water. That would spoil your market, squire!"

Mr. Wilkins muttered something about edge-tools; but his seafaring guest answered the remark by a short laugh of scorn. "You know a thing or two," he said incisively; "so do I. Are we or are we not to act in concert? If not, up with your colours and fire a broadside. Anyhow, friend or enemy, I'll thank you to speak out."

All Mr. Wilkins's liveliness vanished in an

instant, and he seemed strongly and soberly in earnest as he said : “ I will speak out, as you call it. I should very much prefer to be on good terms with you. I should like us, as far as we prudently can, to co-operate. But you have not as yet told me what you would have me do.”

“ I’ll tell you,” said Hold confidentially, edging his chair nearer to the lawyer’s. “ When you go down to Carbery—— You mean to go, don’t you ?” he added abruptly.

“ Certainly,” said the lawyer, touching a spring in the table by which he sat, and producing from a concealed drawer, that flew open at his touch, a letter, which he unfolded and handed to his visitor. “ You know so much, captain, that I need not keep back this from you. It is from Sir Sykes,

as you see. The contents are probably not strange to you."

"Not likely," returned the seaman, throwing his eyes, with ill-dissembled eagerness, on the letter. "He asks you to come down then, and names an early day. The rents will be passing through your hands before long, Mister. 'Tain't that, though, I want to speak of. You'll find when you get to the Chase, a young lady there."

"I understood that Sir Sykes had two daughters," said the attorney innocently.

"He had three, if you come to that," was Hold's rough answer. "But this is no daughter. Maybe she'll be a daughter-in-law, some fine day."

"Oho!" said Mr. Wilkins, arching his

eyebrows. "Young lady on a visit, I presume?"

"On a very long visit," answered Hold. "A ward she is of the Bart., orphan daughter of an old Indian brother officer. Name of Willis; Christian name Ruth."

"Ruth!" Trained and practised as the sharp London man of business was in the incessant struggle of wits and jarring interests, he could not repress the exclamation. "Bless me—Ruth!" he added breathlessly, and grew red and pale by turns. There seemed to be some magic in the sound of that apparently simple name which affected those who heard it.

"Name of Willis; Christian name Ruth," repeated Hold. "Like one of themselves she is now. Shouldn't wonder if she were

to change her name, first to Mrs. Captain Denzil, afterwards to Lady Denzil when Sir Jasper that will be comes into title and property. You've known Sir Jasper that will be, squire; you've had dealings with him. Now, mark me! The sooner that young dandy makes up his mind to place a gold ring on Miss Ruth's pretty finger, the better for him and for the Bart. and for you too, Mr. Wilkins. 'A nod's as good as a wink'—you know the rest of the proverb." And throwing on the table a card, on which were legibly pencilled the words 'CAPTAIN HOLD. Inquire at Plugger's Boarding-house;' and promising, ominously, to see Mr. Wilkins again, in London or at Carbery, the seaman took his leave.

Left alone, the lawyer's features relaxed

into a smile of satisfaction. "A cleverish fellow and vain of his cleverness, this Hold, but very communicative. It would surprise you, my good captain, if you knew how very much you have been kind enough to tell me, during our late interview."

CHAPTER VI.

JASPER FEELS PERPLEXED.

JASPER DENZIL, as he slowly made his elaborate toilet on the sunny September morning which succeeded to the eventful night on which he had espied from his window Ruth's slight form gliding across the lonely park, turned over many things in his mind. His man, who groaned over the dull monotony of rural existence, and longed to be once more in Mount Street or Bond Street lodgings, silently opined, as he applied the ivory-backed brushes to his master's hair, or removed the silver-gilt

stoppers of the scent-bottles, that 'the captain' was brooding over his turf calamities. But he was wrong. Jasper's reverie was on a different theme.

Who or what was this mysterious Miss Willis, this interesting orphan, whom regard for the mythical major her defunct papa had induced Sir Sykes to take into the bosom of his family? The conversation which he had overheard when lurking in the frowsy garden of *The Traveller's Rest* recurred again and again to his memory, and served to explain much, but not all. That the presence beneath his roof-tree of Ruth Willis had been imposed upon the baronet by Hold's importunity, he well knew. That he had with his own ears heard Hold describe her as his sister, he well remem-

bered, but he recalled too the sneering tone in which the adventurer had claimed kindred with the Indian orphan.

Of one thing alone did Captain Denzil feel sure. Ruth, be her understanding with Hold what it might, was a lady, and no blood-relation of the rough rover who claimed to be her brother. Who then *was* this Ruth? Again and again Jasper's thoughts flew back to the little sister that had died so early, and whose untimely death was reported to have made the owner of Carbery Chase the morose joyless recluse that he had long been. Could it be—was it possible that the child had not died at all, that a false registry, a sham burial, had thrown dust in credulous eyes, and that the missing member of the family, hidden for



HELEN

MARZONI

years from all eyes, had at length been introduced under a fictitious name into the household ?

A profound distrust of their fellow-creatures is usually a cardinal point of belief with young men of such tastes and habits as those of Jasper ; nor did he find it difficult to accredit Sir Sykes with concealed villainy of some sort, or Miss Willis with not, as in sporting language he pithily paraphrased it, 'running square.' But he did desire to find a conceivable motive of some kind ; and in the absence of that was driven to speculations too wild to shape themselves in rational form.

"If the governor had been touched in the head"—thus ran the son's dutiful meditations—"I could have set down the thing as

a rich man's crazed caprice ; but no ! he's as sound as a bell. And then that fellow the pirate actually bullying him to get this girl foisted upon us ! What imaginable interest can he have in planting her at Carbery Chase, or what can be the bond of union between a refined dainty little creature and a buccaneering vagabond of his stamp ? The whole affair is a riddle."

It might be added that Jasper was not an adept in the solution of such social puzzles. Turf rascalities of any sort came quite naturally within the compass of an understanding well fitted to grasp all that could be done on the offensive or the defensive where a race-horse was concerned. He knew as much as an outsider could know regarding touts and horse-watchers, stable strategy

and the tactics of the course. He no more expected straightforward conduct on the part of an owner than on that of a trainer or of a jockey. He did not except even those owners, trainers, and jockeys, whose honesty was proverbial on the English turf. The money to be won was in his eyes motive sufficient for any moral obtuseness. But the behaviour of Sir Sykes did not square itself with any of his ethical theories, however tolerant.

When, for the very first time since his accident at the steeplechase, Captain Denzil made his appearance at the family breakfast-table, he received the congratulations of his sisters on the marked improvement in his looks. And it was a fact that he not merely seemed but felt in better health than before.

in spite of the loss of sleep incumbent on his vigil of the previous night. The activity of his thoughts had stirred his languid pulses and lent a pleasing vigour to his sluggish mind, and he even began to find existence at Carbery more endurable since his fancy had been stimulated by the partial discovery which he had chanced upon.

"I should like to have a word with you, Jasper," said Sir Sykes. (It was a very unusual thing for him to say.) "You will find me in the library after breakfast."

Jasper, who had been stealthily admiring the calm unconcern with which Miss Willis met his gaze, and the perfect steadiness of that young lady's nerves, started, but instantly recovered himself. "To be sure, sir," he said, toying with his tea-spoon,

while his heart quickened its beating. The enigma was about to be solved then. He could not doubt that the communication which his father had to make had reference to the strange doings of which Carbery Chase had of late been the theatre.

Sir Sykes, in his favourite apartment, was not kept waiting very long. His only son, in obedience to his father's invitation, sauntered in with his customary air of nonchalant indifference, and took his seat loungingly in an easy-chair opposite to that of Sir Sykes. The baronet seemed at a loss for words wherewith to begin the announcement he desired to make.

"You are nearly yourself again, Jasper, after your heavy fall?" said Sir Sykes, by way of a prelude to the conversation.

"Yes ; thanks. My arm is a little troublesome, but otherwise I am getting on capitally," replied Jasper after an instant's hesitation. He had hesitated in diplomatic doubt as to whether the part of an invalid would stand him in better stead than that of a flourishing convalescent, but contented himself with giving an ambiguous answer. Had Captain Prodgers or any sporting friend put the query, "I feel fit and well" would have been the appropriate rejoinder ; but with his parent the ex-Lancer did not care to lose any coigne of vantage-ground.

"I am glad of it," mechanically returned the baronet ; and then there was another pause, more awkward than the last.

"My boy," said Sir Sykes, plunging with an effort into the subject nearest to his

thoughts, "you can't suppose that I like to see you wasting your young life in indolent inaction, or that I am blind to the fact that the quiet humdrum ways of Carbery often pall upon you."

Jasper pricked up his ears. Here was an exordium which promised well, too well almost. Could it be possible that his father was going to sign, so to speak, his social ticket-of-leave, and to send him back where fashion reigned supreme—to London, Newmarket, Melton? Had the Fates grown kind; and could he, Jasper Denzil, with a satisfactory bank balance, once more take his place in the constellation of the gilded youth of Britain? He opened his lazy eyes a very little wider, and looked at his father with a renewed interest in the next words that he should hear.

"The case," went on Sir Sykes, "lies in a nutshell. You are discontented simply because you have nothing to occupy you and no one to care for. I should like very much, Jasper, to see you happily married ; I should indeed."

Jasper stared. His roseate visions of a prompt re-appearance in betting-rings and military clubs were fading fast. But this novel anxiety on the part of Sir Sykes as to his son's matrimonial future might be twisted somehow into the foundation of at least a qualified prosperity. "He can't mean," such was Jasper's inward soliloquy, "myself and my wife to be mere pensioners, living indolently here at Carbery. He must do something for us, he must indeed ; unless it is an heiress he is about to suggest as a

desirable daughter-in-law.”—“I suppose I must marry, like other people, some of these days,” said Jasper, with Pall-Mall philosophy.

“And there is this advantage in your position,” returned Sir Sykes, in a quick, flurried manner, “that you need not look for fortune in a wife. The heir-expectant of Carbery can afford to disregard such matters as dowry and portion.”

A little pink flush rose to the roots of Jasper’s fair hair. He did not quite enjoy the hearing himself described as heir-expectant, not feeling sure but that a covert sneer was intended; but it was pleasant to be told that he was not expected to earn his bread, as he had known other broken-down men of fashion to do, by wedlock. Perhaps it was rank, not wealth, on which

the governor's thoughts ran—perhaps Lady Gladys De Vere. But here Jasper's meditations were interrupted, and his thoughts turned into a new channel, when the baronet suddenly said: "Has it never occurred to you that Miss Willis, our new inmate here at Carbery, was a very charming little person, a good girl, and a clever one, and who would make an excellent wife?"

The explosion of a hand-grenade would not have produced a more startling effect on Jasper's nerves than did this wholly unexpected speech on the part of Sir Sykes. For a moment or two he sat motionless, with arched eyebrows and parted lips, and then said, stammeringly: "Why, I thought the relationship—no, not that, but I supposed—obstacle—marriage!"

It was for Sir Sykes then to look astonished. Either he was a consummate actor, or his son's last words had been to him utterly inexplicable.

"I hardly know," said the baronet, in that cold half-haughty tone that had become habitual to him, "to what you allude, or what insuperable stumbling-block you conceive to stand in your way, should you incline to do so sensible a thing as to pay your addresses to my ward, Miss Willis. She has, it is true, no fortune; but that deficiency, as I have already said, is one which I can easily remedy. In addition to Carbery Chase, which is quite," he added with marked emphasis, "at my own disposal, I have a large amount of personal property, and should be willing to settle

a considerable income on your wife—I say on your wife, Jasper, because, unhappily, I cannot rely on your prudence where money is concerned.”

“I know I’ve made too strong running, know it well enough,” answered the ex-cavalry officer, stroking his yellow moustache; “and I don’t deny, sir, that you have treated me very kindly as to money and that. But really and seriously, sir, *can* you wish me to marry Miss Willis?”

“Really, my son, your pertinacity in cross-questioning me on the matter is—I am sure most unwittingly—almost offensive,” replied Sir Sykes nervously. “Nor do I see what there would be so very wonderful in your selection of an amiable and accomplished girl, domiciled in your father’s

house, and the daughter of—poor Willis!” added the baronet in conclusion, as though the memory of the deceased major had suddenly recurred to him with unusual vividness.

Jasper, who remembered the conversation which he had overheard at *The Traveller's Rest*, fairly gasped for breath. His parent's talent for duplicity seemed to him to be something strange and shocking, as the untruthfulness of an elder generation always does appear.

“I should not have urged my views upon you as I have done,” continued Sir Sykes after a pause, “but that I have some idea that the young lady who has been the unconscious subject of this conversation entertains—what shall I say?—a prefer-

ence for your society, which her feminine tact enables her to hide from general notice. I feel assured that it only rests with you to win the heart of Ruth Willis—a prize worth the winning.”

We are all very vain. Jasper, fop and worldling though he was, felt a thrill of gratified vanity run through him like an electric shock, as his father’s artful suggestion sank into the depths of his selfish mind. But he made haste to put in a disclaimer.

“I’m afraid, sir, you are too partial a judge,” he said, with an involuntary glance at the Venice mirror opposite. “Miss Willis is too sensible to care about a good-for-nothing fellow like me.”

“I think otherwise, Jasper,” returned Sir

Sykes. "However, for the present we have talked enough. My wishes, remember, and even—even my welfare, for reasons not just now to be explained, are on the side of this marriage. Think it over. To you it means easy circumstances, a home of your own, the reversion of Carbery Chase, my cordial good-will, and the society of a charming and high-principled wife. Think it over."

"I will think it over, sir," said Jasper, rising from his chair, and lounging out of the library with the same listless swagger as that with which he had lounged into it. "I should be glad of course to meet your wishes, and that. Quite a surprise though."

Left alone, Sir Sykes buried his face in

his hands, and when he raised it again it looked old, worn, and haggard. "That scoundrel Hold," he said with a sigh, "makes me pay a heavy price for his silence, and even now his motives are to me a problem that I cannot solve."

CHAPTER VII.

A NEIGHBOURLY VISIT.

JASPER, as he walked with dawdling gait back to the morning-room—the ex-cavalry officer always did dawdle, except in the hunting-field or when race-horses were thundering past the judge's chair—felt what in his case did duty for brains to be in a dizzy whirl. He could not grapple with the mystery which seemed to have chosen Carbery Chase for its head-quarters. The captain was by no means, as has been said, one of those guileless youths, if such there be, who are slow to think evil. Shew him

a plain, intelligible, sordid motive, and no one could be quicker in descrying it, no matter how fair a pretence of decorous honour might be kept up. But this was beyond him. "No kith or kin of mine after all!" he muttered as he made his way along the thickly carpeted corridor. "I must have been wrong, absurdly wrong all the time. But why my father should press me so hard on this subject no fellow could understand. He's in earnest though, about desiring the match."

As he spoke he laid his grasp on the handle of the door of the morning-room, turned it, and entering, found with a complacent smile, that Ruth Willis was alone. Captain Denzil was on sufficiently good terms with himself, but even coxcombs are

glad of the confirmatory suffrages of others ; and Jasper felt as though he were under a sort of obligation to the baronet's ward for having paid him the compliment of falling in love with him.

"I thought," said Jasper, as if to apologise for his presence in that pretty room, where a man seemed incongruous with the surroundings, "that my sisters were here."

"Shall I call them?" asked Ruth, with that sweet hypocrisy which girls only can exhibit, and half-rising from the tiny work-table as she spoke.

"Pray don't. *I* have nothing on earth to say to them, or indeed to anybody," said Jasper. "Life drags at Carbery like wheels on a mud-plastered road. Don't you find it so too, Miss Willis?"

"Indeed I do not," answered the Indian orphan, taking up the cudgels gracefully in defence of her guardian's home. "I should be very ungrateful if I did. It is not every day that a lonely little thing like myself is taken into the house of a kind dear family of new-old friends, who cherish and protect, and pet and spoil her, as your good father and sisters have done, Captain Denzil, to poor little Ruth Willis."

She said this so well, did Ruth, in a voice that was slightly tremulous and with eyes that swam in tears, that Jasper was for the moment fairly taken in. There was uncommonly little sentiment in his own composition, but such men as he was, still like women to be softer-hearted than themselves, and then Miss Willis looked very pretty and delicate

and helpless as she glanced up at him from under the screen of her dark eyelashes.

"I can't stand it, indeed I can't, if you cry, Miss Willis!" he said, drawing a chair up to the tiny work-table. "You have found me a sad bore and a sad plague, I am afraid, since I was stupid enough to do this at Pebworth races."

As he spoke he looked down at his arm, which still reposed in its silken sling, and assumed a melancholy air, although in truth he felt all but well again. Ruth, from beneath her eyelashes, scanned him more narrowly than he was aware of.

"Is he amusing himself at my expense?" thus ran her quick thoughts. "Or has he been applying thus early in the day to the cherry-brandy in his hunting-flask, or the

contents of the decanters? No; he seems sober, and civil too. This is a puzzle."

Miss Willis was justified in her perplexity, for this attention on Jasper's part was something new. The captain was not one of those men, of whom there are no lack, who in a country-house flirt to pass the time away, as naturally and with as little ulterior design as they smoke a cigar during their early stroll about the stables or the Home Farm. He had accepted, as an Eastern despot accepts the homage of his courtiers, fifty petty kindnesses at Ruth's hands during his illness, and had preferred her company to that of Lucy and Blanche simply because she was cleverer than they, and had the tact not to weary him.

"I was sorry to see you so much in pain,

Captain Denzil, and glad when I could be of any use," answered Ruth, plying her needle with that demure industry which can be intermitted or resumed with such skilful effect in the course of a conversation.

"Yes ; and I was bear enough never to thank you, Miss Ruth. May I call you Ruth?" said Jasper, as he bent forward and took the girl's slender little hand in his. It was the first time that he had ever touched the hand of Miss Willis, save in the ceremonial salute with which members of a household meet for the day or part for the night.

"I like to be called Ruth by my friends," returned the baronet's ward. "Dear Blanche and Lucy always call me by my Christian name, and that pleases me, for I think it proves that they do not any longer regard

me as a stranger. And that is much to me."

There was a sweet simplicity, a touching pathos in Ruth's tone not wholly thrown away on Jasper. He could not quite distinguish whether or not she were playing a part; but if this were acting, he owned that it was, of its kind, excellent.

"I hope you count me among your friends?" he said, still keeping captive the little hand that he held.

"I shall be very pleased to do so," returned Ruth, with a downward droop of her silken eye-lashes.

"I wish I did know how to please you. It's a lesson I should like to learn," said the captain, with a warmth that surprised himself; but before Miss Willis could return

an appropriate answer, the door opened so quickly that she had barely time to snatch away her hand from Jasper's grasp before his two sisters were in the room. Blanche Denzil had an open note in her hand, and both girls wore an expression more animated than usual. Lucy was the first to speak.

"We want you, Jasper, to drive up with us to High-Tor, if you feel strong enough this morning. Maud has written to Blanche, as she promised, you know, to let us know when her silver pheasants arrived from the dealer's in London; and this note"—and Lucy indicated the letter in her sister's hand—"has just come, begging us to go round and see the birds made comfortable in their new abode. The day is charming. You must come with us, indeed."

"Pheasants before the First of October gives one leave to shoot them are not much in my line," said Jasper carelessly. "What are *your* plans for this morning, Miss Willis?"

Ruth with becoming modesty replied that Captain Denzil was only too good to inquire as to the proceedings of so insignificant a person as she was. "I try to be useful," she said. "Sometimes Sir Sykes allows me to read aloud to him the newspaper or a book. If nobody wants me, I think I shall stroll down to the quiet cool path in the woods beside the river. It is a favourite haunt of mine."

"Well, I'll walk down there with you, if you don't mind my cigar, Miss Willis," replied the captain languidly. "I don't

want particularly to go to High Tor, or to go into ecstasies over the fine feathers of a lot of fancy poultry cooped in a pen and called pheasants."

"No, no," said Blanche and Lucy with one accord ; "we are not going to allow you to play truant to-day. You must come, and so must Ruth. We never thought of leaving her behind" (this by-the-bye was the whitest of white fibs, for up to that moment Ruth's companionship on the projected expedition had never once crossed the mind of either of the sisters) ; "and there is plenty of room for all in the double basket-carriage."

"I shall be bored, and shew it. The De Veres are not a bit in my line. Harrogate, for instance, I can't get on with for five minutes — my fault, I daresay. But he

knows nothing and cares nothing about the things that interest me ; and I trouble my head just as little about his model cottages and reclamation of waste lands and militia drill. The one subject we have in common is fox-hunting, and even on that we take somewhat different views." This was a long speech for Jasper ; but the concession which it somewhat ungraciously implied was readily accepted by his jubilant sisters.

" You forget Lady Gladys," said Blanche archly ; " she would never forgive us if we appeared without you."

The double basket-carriage, one of those convenient, roomy, and perhaps to male eyes ugly vehicles, that do so much good service in country places, came round in due course, drawn by a pair of strong and spirited

Exmoor ponies, coblike, sturdy little animals, well fitted to make light of the steep Devonshire roads, yet showing some of the fire and fleetness due to their dash of Arab blood. The 'clothes'-basket on wheels,' as Jasper irreverently styled it, received its human freight; Miss Willis, in spite of Blanche's instances, seating herself meekly with her back to the horses, and the captain of course beside her. Lucy took the reins; the smart boy in livery, who had been standing at the ponies' heads, let go the bridles and sprang deftly to his perch behind as the light carriage bowled merrily away along the smooth park road.

Never yet, since first she made her appearance at Carbery Chase, had Ruth looked one half so attractive, in her quaint elfish way,

as she did then, as, flashing and animated, her dark eyes saying far more than did her lips, she conversed with Jasper on the outward drive.

“I declare,” thought the captain to himself, “if the governor had been a little more explicit, I wouldn’t mind speaking out. With three thousand a year, or four—ay, it would require to be four—the thing might be managed.”

CHAPTER VIII.

AT THE PHEASANTRY.

"I HAVE letters to write—one to the Lord-lieutenant in particular, on county business," said the Earl, smiling, and addressing himself to Captain Denzil ; " otherwise I daresay that I too should have been able to find something worth the showing you out of doors. As it is, you young people must go without me."

Jasper, who had a lazy man's horror of improved implements, Dutch dairies, new patent draining-tiles, and cattle-food, and who knew the Earl's passion for farming,

felt inwardly grateful to the Lord-lieutenant for detaining his noble host within doors. The Countess had not the slightest intention of accompanying her guests in their visit to the pheasantry. Except in a carriage, or in dry weather among the well-rolled paths of the rose-garden, Lady Wolverhampton scarcely ever left the house. Her age, though she looked younger, was within a year or two of that of her lord, and he was by far the stronger of the two. Indeed it was mainly due to her declining health and growing incapacity for exertion that the High Tor family had for this year foregone what most persons of their rank regard less as a pleasure than as a duty, the passing of at least a portion of the season in London.

The party from Carbery Chase had been

very cordially received. People can afford yet to cultivate the old-fashioned quality of cordiality in rural retirement, where it answers to detect hidden merits and to see in the best light the things and persons in the midst of which and whom our lives have to be passed.

“I am glad,” said the Countess, “that Captain Denzil was able to come over with you to-day, my dears.”

With Sir Sykes’s two daughters the mistress of High Tor was on sufficiently familiar terms; but their brother’s character was not quite so much esteemed by the De Vere family as were theirs. Still, in the country, a young man and an elder son is *per se* a being of some importance, and to Jasper, with his arm yet in the black silken

sling, there attached somewhat of romance, on account of his late accident and the adventurous way in which he had incurred it. He had not been expected, and his presence at High Tor was taken as a compliment.

Scarcely had the Ladies Maud and Gladys De Vere had time to don the pretty hats that so well set off the comeliness of the one and the bright beauty of the other, before their brother came into the room. Lord Harrogate had a riding-whip in his hand, and a long ride over the purple moorlands in prospect ; but he was easily induced to defer it, and to make one of the party, that presently sauntered across the park towards a sunny sandy nook, screened from cold north winds by a friendly belt of fir

and pine, where the new pheasantry had been established.

Near to the place where a footpath led to a sequestered dell, the new governess Miss Gray and her pupil met the group of advancing sight-seers. Ethel would have passed on with a quiet graceful bow of recognition ; but Lady Alice had no notion of being thus shelved.

“ You are going to look at the pheasants,” she said ; “ and we have just seen them. They seem rather frightened, but so very pretty ! ”

The words which young Lady Alice had employed when speaking of the exotic birds would have been singularly appropriate to Ethel Gray. The new governess looked timid and something more than pretty

during the general hand-shaking and interchange of civil conventional phrases which now ensued. Jasper, whose acquaintance with Ethel was of the slightest, had contented himself with lifting his hat; but he had stared at her beautiful face with as cool a steadiness of gaze as though she had been a picture or a statue. Why Lord Harrogate should have resented this, it would have been no easy matter for his lordship to explain; but there was scorn, and anger too, in the glance which he shot at unconscious Jasper; while it was not without some embarrassment that he addressed a word or two of polite commonplace to Miss Gray. Then the governess and her pupil pursued their way to the house, and the rest of the party strolled on towards the pheasantry.

"How handsome she is!" exclaimed honest Lucy Denzil, looking back after the angular form of Lady Alice, and the graceful figure that contrasted so strongly with the bony awkwardness of the school-girl; and Lady Maud echoed the praise, and Lady Gladys smiled approval. The Earl's second daughter was, as has been said, very lovely, and her golden hair and blue eyes had produced the usual effect of fascinating for the time being Jasper's fickle fancy. It is quite possible to be very hard and at the same time very weak where women are concerned; and Captain Denzil, wary man of the world as he boasted himself to be, and selfish as he certainly was, could not at the moment resist the spell of the enchantress.

"Cripple as I am," said Jasper, glancing

at his injured arm, "you see that I could not resist the temptation to come when you asked me."

"They are not my pheasants; they are Maud's, you know," returned Lady Gladys, as though wilfully misunderstanding him.

"Fortunate birds!—that is if you condescend to take an interest in them," said the captain, nonchalant as ever, but contriving to throw into his tone and look a something of suppressed tenderness, that was not perhaps wholly feigned. Ruth Willis saw the look, although she was not near enough to overhear the words, and her eyes flashed and her white teeth closed sharply, almost savagely, on her pouting lip. She felt the mortification which an angler might feel did he see the half-hooked salmon, the

silvery patriarch of the pool, desert his bait, and leap provokingly at the artificial fly of some rival disciple of Piscator. She could not forget how, an hour or two ago, the heir of Carbery had deigned to devote to her service those very tricks of manner—in her anger she mentally called them so—which now before her very eyes he was practising for the benefit of another. She did not care for him ; but he piqued her, by the very effrontery of his fickleness, into attaching to him a value which in calmer moments she would never have set on one so intrinsically base as Jasper Denzil.

In spite of world-old experience and sage aphorisms, each sex remains to some extent a standing problem to the other. So Ruth Willis, nettled, baffled, wrathful, still did not

fathom the depths of Jasper's worthless nature one half so clearly as she would have done had her keen powers of observation been exercised at the expense of a woman. She even felt angry with Lady Gladys, though most unreasonably, for the proud beauty wore her most glacial armour of chilling haughtiness when she perceived that Jasper was disposed to pay her what are popularly known as 'marked attentions.'

The innocent pheasants, the ostensible end and object of this expedition, were duly inspected, and lavishly fed with the millet and barley, the chopped eggs and crushed maize, which young pheasants love. They were fair enough to look upon, these shy pretty captives, still timorous and bewildered by their close

confinement in the darksome baskets wherein they had been crammed by the irreverent poultry-merchant who had consigned them to High Tor; and not yet quite at home in their new abode, which had been so freshly decorated for their reception that the paint on the wood and the lacquer on the wires were barely dry. Golden pheasants there were, and white or silver pheasants, and pencilled pheasants, worthy descendants of a feathered ancestry that had pecked and strutted in the gardens of coral-buttoned mandarins, in far-off China.

The curious thing was, that except by their mistress Lady Maud and the elder of the two Denzil girls, who was a kindred spirit, the pheasants were scarcely looked

at with regardful eyes. Is it not always so? At launch or military review or polo-match, or when a princely trowel of pure gold condescendingly applies a dab of sublime mortar to a glorified foundation-stone of some new building, how very, very few of the nominal spectators concentrate their thoughts and their vision on the show, which the reporters will presently describe with such graphic power! Private affairs, hopes, fears, interests, are all of them petty magnets sufficient to neutralise the great avowed attraction of the hour.

There was Ruth Willis, her whole attention stealthily concentrating itself upon Captain Denzil at the side of the Earl's second daughter; there was Jasper, vainly trying to thaw the ice of Lady Gladys' disdain;

and Lord Harrogate, whose thoughts seemed at times to wander away from the present scene and company. Add to these Blanche Denzil, sorrowfully conscious that Lord Harrogate himself, in whose eyes she would have given much to find favour, was thinking of anything rather than of her preference for him, and it will be seen that the real amateurs of fancy pheasants were but in a narrow minority.

A good girl who loves a man worthy of her esteem, yet who is constrained by maiden modesty and the rules of good-breeding to hide away the sentiment as though it were a sin, deserves more pity than often falls to her lot. It is never Leap-year for her. She cannot be the first to speak. And if there be one point upon which men are exception-

ally blind, it is to the perception that their merits may be highly appreciated by some young lady to whom they never give a thought when absent from her. Poor Blanche had trouble enough now and then to keep down the rising tears that welled up to her eyes as she noted twenty signs of the painful fact that Lord Harrogate regarded her with that amicable indifference which cannot readily ripen, as dislike sometimes can, into love. But Blanche was too gentle to grow bitter over a disappointment, as did Ruth Willis, although for her too the pleasure of the day was damped and dulled.

The visitors from Carbery would not, on getting back to the broad gravelled drive where the basket-carriage awaited them,

re-enter the house. They had taken leave of the Earl and Countess, and declined all hospitable proffers of luncheon beforehand. There was some kissing among the girls and a good deal of hand-shaking, and then the 'double basket' again received its living load, and 'good-bye' was said, and off dashed the mettled Exmoor ponies under Lucy Denzil's guidance.

Two of the party from the Chase carried back with them to Carbery hearts that were heavier than when they had first set out for the projected visit to the pheasantry at High Tor. Sir Sykes's ward, so talkative two hours ago, had become sullenly mute. Ruth Willis was smarting under her defeat, for she had measured herself with Lady Gladys, and could not but acknowledge

to herself that her own elfish piquancy was quite thrown into the shade by the superior charms of the Earl's daughter. Blanche was sad and thoughtful. Jasper, twisting his well-waxed moustache, seemed unaware, in the preoccupation of his own mind, that Ruth was resentful and Blanche melancholy, while Miss Denzil frankly wondered why conversation languished as it did. Excellent Lucy had had no by-play to distract her attention from the object of the expedition; she had seen the birds and chatted with her friend, and was mildly gratified with her outing. Nevertheless it was but a silent party that the Exmoor ponies whisked back along the well-kept road that led to Carbery Chase.

CHAPTER IX.

THE NEW BROOM.

"CLEVER enough, and too clever! It's your look-out, sir, of course, and not mine; but I can't help thinking that to give my friend Mr. Wilkins an estate to manage is uncommonly like turning a fox into a poultry-yard to take care of the chickens."

Such was Jasper Denzil's remonstrance with his father, on hearing the baronet's announcement of his intention to transfer the reins of local government to the willing hands of the City solicitor, *vice* Pounce and Pontifex superseded. Privately, Sir Sykes

was of much the same opinion as his son ; but as he was merely seeking to put a good face on what he felt to be really a surrender to a demand imperiously urged, he shook his head, saying : “ You are prejudiced against this person, Jasper, and perhaps not unnaturally so. His manners, I admit, are not prepossessing, and his moral code has probably been shaped in a rough school of ethics ; but I consider him to be one of those men whom it is pleasanter to have for a friend than for an enemy.”

Jasper's expressive upper lip wore a curl of disgust. It was to him very disagreeable that Mr. Wilkins, who had got the better of him, as he resentfully felt, in many an encounter of wits, should be often at Carbery, and right-hand man to its owner. He

resolved on one more attempt to dislodge the intruder.

“I would not, were I you, sir,” said he, “either trust Wilkins a yard farther than I could see him, or be guided by his advice as to the management of the estate. You yourself heard the fellow say, at luncheon to-day, that he should not know turnips when he saw them unless there were boiled mutton in the middle of them. Wilkins only meant to raise a laugh when he hashed up that old joke against the Cockney sportsmen who ride to hounds, but he was nearer the truth than he was aware of.”

“Ah, well,” returned the baronet blandly, “I daresay his agricultural knowledge is after all pretty much on a par with that of Messrs. Pounce and Pontifex.”

And then Jasper shrugged up his shoulders and was silent, for he perceived that it was hopeless to deprecate a foregone conclusion. For good or for ill, Sir Sykes had made up his mind to convert Mr. Wilkins into a grand-vizier over the broad acres that lay within the circuit of his wide-stretching ring-fence.

Enoch Wilkins, gentleman, had on that morning reached Carbery Chase, and was in a fair way of earning for himself any rather than golden opinions from its inmates. Mr. Wilkins, as he often and not untruly boasted, knew the world, that is to say he had a minute and almost microscopic acquaintance with one or two sections of the shady side of it. He understood turf-men, as a smart prison-governor understands

convicts, and knew the natural history of the fast-living and embarrassed young officer as well as some lecturer on entomology knows the ways of beetle and butterfly. In a lower social grade, he was deeply versed in the arcana of Loan Societies, and could apply the thumbscrew of the County Court in nicely calculated proportions to a struggling debtor. Of what he called swell society Mr. Wilkins had but a limited experience. He had shared, as the purveyors of welcome cash often do share, in the costly banquets given at Greenwich or Richmond hotels by wild young gentlemen of blood and fashion. He had even, at the instance of some needy man about town who curried favour with any dispenser of ready-money, received a card which entitled

him, now and again, to be crushed and jostled and trodden upon by distinguished company at the maddening 'At Home' of some berouged and bewigged old peeress.

There was, as Mr. Wilkins felt with some inward misgivings, a difference between forming part of a mob at Macbeth House or at the Baratarian Embassy, and mixing on intimate terms with such a family as were the Denzils. Yet, as the French idiomatically twist the phrase, he paid it off with audacity, being greasily familiar with Sir Sykes; on terms of brotherly frankness where Jasper was concerned; and for the benefit of the young ladies, assuming the character of the facetious and agreeable rattle, as he conceived incumbent on a

regular Londoner, and a bachelor to boot, when on a visit in the country.

Blanche and Lucy Denzil scarcely knew whether to let amusement or dislike predominate in their minds as Mr. Wilkins rattled on, pouring out miscellaneous anecdotes and jokes that, if worn threadbare in the metropolis, would, he was convinced, retain enough of their original gloss and sparkle to pass muster in the country. That the man was coarse, pushing, and unscrupulous, was evident even to critics so lenient as the baronet's daughters; while Sir Sykes, behind his urbane smile, suffered martyrdom from his new agent's deportment.

There was one member of the family circle at Carbery whom Mr. Wilkins eyed with quite an exceptional interest. He

rarely addressed himself in conversation to the Indian orphan, Sir Sykes's ward, but he watched her narrowly, and the more he saw of her the harder he found it to adhere to his original hypothesis as regarded the young lady whom Richard Hold, master mariner, had recommended to his good offices.

"If that demure manner and those down-cast eyes do not belong to as sly a puss as ever lived, write me down a greenhorn!" was the mental reflection of Enoch Wilkins, of St. Nicholas Poultney, in the City of London, gentleman. "That she sets her cap at the captain, Sir Sykes Denzil's hopeful heir, I take for granted. Her communicative friend, the pirate fellow, implied as much. The Lancer does not

seem, however, disposed to come forward in a satisfactory style, and play Philemon to her Baucis."

And it was a fact that since the morning which had witnessed the drive to High Tor and the visit to the pheasantry, the snares of Miss Ruth Willis had been vainly set for the capture of that bird of dubious feather, Jasper Denzil.

Why Jasper, who had so much to gain by the match on which his father's mind was inexplicably bent, should hang back and prove recalcitrant, it was hard to say. His was not an independent soul. He was free from any trammels of a too scrupulous delicacy, and would have fingered any money got through the grimest channels, without fear of soiling those white useless

hands of his, the manliest work of which had hitherto been to grasp a bridle-rein. Yet Jasper had been very remiss of late in his attentions towards Ruth Willis, and apparently indifferent to the bribe of an income and establishment to be earned by marrying her.

“Now look here, Sir Sykes!” said the lawyer after dinner, as he edged his chair nearer to that of his host, refilled his glass, and assumed a tone of waggish confidence—“look here, Sir Sykes! You want brushing up down here at Carbery, you do indeed; ay, and a little fresh air let in upon you. In an old estate like this, and under such management as those of Pounce and Proser—beg his pardon; I mean Pontifex; ha, ha, ha!”—pursued Mr. Wilkins, having

his laugh out, without so much as a sympathetic titter from Jasper or a smile from Sir Sykes—"in an estate of this kind matters are apt to stagnate, and all sorts of abuses and jobs to grow up, like the green duckweed on the surface of a pool. Your head-gamekeeper now, Sir Sykes, I never saw him, but I'm sure that he's a rogue."

"Leathers is an old servant," answered Sir Sykes coldly; "I have had no reason to think ill of him."

"I'll go bail that he's a rogue, for all that," returned the unabashed lawyer, holding up his glass to the light, to admire the ruby claret before he swallowed it. "The head-keeper of an easy-going, moneyed gent of your standing—excuse me, Sir Sykes—

must be a saint, if he's not a sinner. Think of the temptations! Why, the rabbits alone must be a cool two hundred a year to the man; and then the pheasants, and the black-mail from the tenants for keeping the ground-game within reasonable numbers, and the percentage on watchers' wages. I'll get you a contract with a London poulterer, Sir Sykes, that shall stand you in something handsome, provide you with a keeper twice as useful as Leathers, and insure your having a hot corner for your friends at battue-time. I'm a new broom, and sweep clean."

"You promise well, at any rate!" said Jasper, with a languid sneer.

"And did you ever know me not ready to perform when I had once promised?" briskly retorted the solicitor. "I merely

mention the gamekeeper to show that all's fish that comes to my net, and that I am not above attending to such minor fry as a fellow in velveteen with a dog-whistle at his button-hole. We must go on commercial principles, Sir Sykes, if we want to manage an estate so as to make it pay, nowadays. All that feudal nonsense of an affectionate tenantry and a liberal lord of the manor is about as dead as Queen Anne. You should get a new steward, as well as a new gamekeeper, Sir Sykes."

The baronet stirred restlessly in his chair. He did not at all like this. Carbery, and the fair estate that went with it, had never yet been administered on commercial principles, especially when applied by so sweeping a reformer as Mr. Wilkins of St. Nicholas

Poultney. "Mr. Cornish keeps his accounts very correctly," he said in a hesitating tone. "Old Lord Harrogate gave him the stewardship, which his father had had before him, and his tenure of it has satisfied me."

"Because you can afford, or fancy you can, to be robbed right and left," said the lawyer, gulping down his wine. "It is your plausible hereditary steward, that has fattened and batted on the plunder of successive generations, who sucks the very marrow out of the land. Don't tell *me*! I'll overhaul Mr. Cornish's accounts in a way he's little used to. But, first, you must introduce me to the farmers, Sir Sykes, and give me time to worm out of them what they pay, in kind or money, by way of fines, good-will, premium, and so forth, for the

honour of tilling your under-rented acres. I'll raise your rent-roll, never fear me, but not with a native chawbacon for prime-minister."

"So the steward must be flung overboard, it seems, as well as poor old Leathers, the keeper," observed Jasper, half amused, but half annoyed.

"And I've got another peg to fit into the vacant hole," said the lawyer, again addressing himself to the claret. "With your permission, Sir Sykes, to-morrow we'll wire for him to run down from London for your approval. A sharp fellow is Abrahams. You won't mind his persuasion? Jew as he is, he's thoroughly at home in a farmhouse, counts every sheaf of wheat in the barn, and every house-lamb in the kitchen on frosty

days, and wheedles out of the women what the husbands are too dogged to tell.—This is delicious claret, but no one except myself seems to drink it. Suppose we join the ladies ?”

“What has the governor done,” groaned Jasper, as he lit his cigar, “to be under the thumb of such a man as this ?”

CHAPTER X.

AT THE STANNARIES.

"WE shall have a delightful day," said young Lady Alice, joyously, as the sweet scent of the bruised heather and the steam of the wet earth came floating on the breeze, and the clouds rolled off majestically seawards, leaving the broad surface of Dartmoor, like a purple robe dashed with green, flecked and dappled by the dancing sunbeams. "A delightful day for our peep at the old Stannaries," repeated the girl. "The air will be all the fresher, and the weather steadier, for the heavy shower of this morning."

Lady Alice, the youngest and, some said, the cleverest of the Earl's daughters, was an indulged child, and there was a carriage at High Tor which she regarded as her very own. This was a low wagonette, built of light osier-work, lined with dark blue, and drawn by a hairy-heeled pony, quite as shaggy as a bear, and not much bigger than a Newfoundland dog. The villagers for miles around were tolerably familiar with the jingle of the bells that were attached to the pony's collar ; but on the present occasion the boy in livery who held the reins had been bidden to strike into one of the rugged roads that led into the moor itself, where hamlets were scarce, and even isolated dwellings few and far between.

"It would be a thousand pities," said

Lady Alice presently, turning towards Ethel, who sat beside her in the wagonette, "not to show you the Stannaries — which are among our principal lions hereabouts—before the winter-storms set in. It is not always pleasant, or quite safe, to go so far into the moor after apple-harvest."

"But you forget," said Ethel, smiling, "that I, in my ignorance, have not the very faintest idea as to what Stannaries may be."

"Is it possible!" exclaimed the child, turning upon her governess a glance of that pitying wonder with which the very young receive a confession of deficient information on the part of their elders. "Did you really never hear, Miss Gray, of our Cornish and Devon tin-mines?—we call them Stannaries because *stannum* is the Latin word for tin,

you know — which were worked, ever so many hundreds and thousands of years ago, by Phœnicians and Carthaginians and Jews I believe, and Romans I am sure. Very ancient they are at any rate, and very curious ; and I want to show you ours, the only ones in this part of Dartmoor, with the stone huts of the miners still standing, although no tin has been taken out of the lodes for many a long year.”

Ethel laughed good-humouredly at her own scanty stock of local lore.

“I have read,” she said gently, “of tin-mines in Cornwall, and of that place with the odd name Marazion, which made people fancy the Lost Tribes were to be looked for somewhere near the Land’s End, and how the Phœnicians came of old in ships to fetch

the tin away. But I did not know they came to Devon too."

"O yes; they did," persisted Lady Alice, eager for the credit of her county. "Our workings are quite as ancient as the great Cornish mines, though not so big. And there was once a Mayor of Halgaver, and a sort of diggers' law on the moor, as there is among the gold-seekers in Australia now. I have heard Papa speak of it. But there is the farmhouse"—pointing to a dwelling, screened by black firs from the cold north-east winds, which crowned a swelling ridge of high ground—"where we can leave the pony till we have finished our explorings. You are a capital walker, and so am I; and the way to enjoy the moor and understand it is to cross it on foot."

The pony, wagonette, and lad in livery being duly left at the farm, the two girls set off together to traverse the distance that intervened between the ridge on which the house was built and a bleak table-land from which cropped up, like fossil mushrooms, many gray stones of various shapes.

"Those are the Circles—the Rounds as the poor people call them," said Lady Alice, in her character of cicerone. "Nobody in these parts cares to be near them after dark. They are said to be haunted, but that is all nonsense, of course."

"They look cold and ghostly enough even in broad daylight," said Ethel, as they pushed on along a broad smooth track of emerald green, one of several green belts that varied the dull purple of the sea of

heather. Overhead, on tireless wing, the hawk wheeled. The lapwing, with complaining note, skimmed the plain, striving with world-old artifice of drooping wing and broken flight, to lure away the human intruders from her flat nest, full of speckled eggs. The moorland hare, dark-furred and long-limbed, broke abruptly from her seat and galloped off unpursued. The Circles were reached at last, and proved to be quaint rings of dilapidated buildings, all of unhewn stone and of the rudest construction. Here and there the huts, roof and walls alike composed of rough slabs, were intact. Nothing could be more desolate than the appearance of these bare, gaunt hovels, reared by the hands of the long dead, standing solitary in the midst of a desert.

“Here they lived, once upon a time, those old people, the heathen miners, whose bronze tools and lumps of ore and morsels of charred wood are even now sometimes picked up by boys who hunt for birds’ eggs on the moor. They worked near the surface, and never drove their galleries very deep into the earth. And then came Christian times, when these hovels were inhabited by very different dwellers, until at last the mines were given up as no longer worth the labour of winning the tin.”

Ethel looked around her with a kind of awe. She had imagination enough to enable her to realise the dim Past, when these deserted huts were peopled by inhabitants strange of garb and speech, gnomes of the mine utterly unlike to any who now tread

English ground. In fancy she could behold the motley throng of Pagan toilers, whose bronze picks had once wrung against gneiss and granite, mica and sandstone, on the now silent moor. There the Briton, his fair skin stained with woad, and the small and swarthy mountaineer whose forefathers had preceded the Celt in ownership of the land, had laboured side by side with Spaniard, Moor, and Goth, with Scythian, Arab, and Indian—slaves all, and mostly captives in war, whom the cruel policy of Rome consigned to far-off regions of the earth, much as our justice stocked Virginian plantations and Australian cattle-runs with the offscourings of ignorance and crime.

It was at the grave, as it were, of a dead industry that Ethel now stood. The ground,

honeycombed by what resembled gigantic rabbit-burrows, was strewed here and there with dross and scorïæ, and blackened by fire, wherever the remains of a rude kiln told of smelting carried on long ago.

“I have all sorts of things to show you,” said Lady Alice impatiently. “Just look into one of the huts, and then wonder how human beings could ever have made a home of such a place. See! It is just like a stone bee-hive—no windows. That was for warmth, I suppose. The little light they wanted came in at the door, no doubt. And up above there, where you see the hole between the stones, the smoke must have found its way out, after it had half-choked the lungs and blinded the eyes of those inside the hut. They wanted a good peat-fire though, to keep

them alive when the great snows of winter fell; and they had it too, for just see how hard and black the earthen floor has become in the course of years. Now then for the mine where the Roman sword was found, and then for the Pixies' Well."

The Pixies' Well proved to be a curious natural depression in the rocky soil, thimble-shaped, and about twenty feet in depth, carpeted with moss of the brightest green from the brink to where the water glimmered starlike from amid rank weeds beneath.

"They say the fairies used to dance round this well on Midsummer night and dip stolen children in the water, that they might never long to go back to earth again, but live contentedly in Elfland. Our Devonshire people believe all sorts of things still, you must

know, though they are getting ashamed of talking about them before strangers.—Are you tired, Miss Gray?”

Miss Gray was not tired, and her mercurial pupil thereupon proposed a visit to a new attraction.

“The idea of it came into my head while we were looking down into the well,” explained Lady Alice; “and though the Hunger Hole is not one of the sights of the Stannaries, still, if you are not afraid of a longer walk, we might visit it and yet be at home in good time. It is a mile or more from here.”

“That is an odd name, the Hunger Hole,” said Ethel. “I suppose there is some legend to account for so ominous a word?”

“There is indeed,” said the Earl’s youngest

daughter as, by Ethel's side, she left the ring of ruinous huts and passed along a strong causeway that led towards the west ; "and moreover, in this case there can be no doubt about its being true. A young Jacobite—it was just after the Northern rising in 1715—fled to a country-house near here, Morford Place, where his mother's family lived, hoping to be sheltered and enabled to embark secretly for France. There had been treachery at work, however, for the fugitive's intentions were revealed to the authorities ; and on the morning of the very day when he arrived in mean disguise, constables and soldiers had searched the mansion from garret to cellar.

"That the poor refugee should be concealed at Morford seemed impossible, and

yet, as the roads were beset and the harbours watched, escape over sea was not for the moment to be thought of. The squire of Morford bethought him of the place that we are going to see, which was then known to very few, and where priests had often been hidden, when every Jesuit who came to England carried his life in his hand. So young Mr. John Grahame—that was his name—was lodged in the grotto that we shall presently see, and sometimes one of the ladies of the family, his cousins, and sometimes a trusty servant, carried him food. But the poor young man had some secret enemy who could not rest until assured of his destruction, for just as the rigour of the pursuit seemed to be over, and it was arranged that the fugitive should be put on

board a smuggling craft bound for the French coast, Morford Place was again searched, and a chain of sentries posted, with orders to shoot whoever tried to pass them by.

“Day after day dragged on, and no food could be conveyed to the unfortunate occupant of the Hiding Hole—the Priest’s Hole, as they called it then—while the dragoons scoured the country, questioning the folks in every village if a stranger had been seen. No doubt it was hoped that famine would force the Jacobite to leave his retreat ; but after a time the soldiers grew tired of waiting, or the authorities imagined they had been on a false scent. At any rate the troops were withdrawn. But when some of the Morford family stole, trembling, to the

unfrequented spot where their luckless kinsman lay hid, they stood aghast to see the raven and the carrion-crow flapping and screaming about the grotto—a sure sign that there was death within. True enough, poor young Grahame had perished of want, sooner than venture forth to be dragged to the jail and the gibbet; and ever since that day the place has borne the name of the Hunger Hole.”

By this time the stony causeway had given place to a narrow footway that led through one of those swamps that vary the undrained surface of Dartmoor. To left and right rose tall reeds, thick enough to simulate a tropical cane-brake, while wild flax, mallows, and stunted alder-bushes abounded. The moor-hen sprang from her nest among the

bull-rushes that bordered the sullen pools of discoloured water, and the snake crept hissing through the coarse grass, as if angry at the unwonted trespass on his haunts. The unstable ground, even at that dry season of the year, shook beneath the feet of the explorers; and it was easy for Ethel to give credence to her pupil's statement that even the hardy moormen avoided Bitternley Swamp in winter.

“The place took its name from the bitterns that used to abound here,” said Lady Alice; “but there is no nook too lonely for the men whom the London bird-stuffers employ, and the last bittern was shot two years since. Soon there won't be a feathered creature, except pheasants and partridges, and perhaps the saucy sparrows,

left alive.—But that”—as they passed a sheet of dark water, stained by the peat of the morass until it resembled ink in hue—“is Blackpool; and yonder, among those rocks on the bank above, is the Hunger Hole. You cannot see the opening of the grotto from here—that is the beauty of it—but wait till we get quite close, and then you will understand how naturally the cave was made to hide in.”

Even when the two girls had got clear of the swamp and scrambled up the rude flight of steps, nearly effaced by time and rains, that facilitated the scaling of the precipitous bank, Ethel could see no signs of the grotto they sought, until her youthful companion pulled aside the hazel boughs, that grew between two angles of lichen-incrusted rock,

and disclosed, about a yard above their heads, a narrow fissure, too low for a person of ordinary stature to enter without stooping, and even then half-hidden by grass and brambles.

"That is the Hunger Hole," said Lady Alice triumphantly. "A fugitive may lie concealed here, I think, if the enemy were ranging all the moor to capture him. It is higher inside than at the mouth, and the bridge within gives access to the inner chamber. Come ; we must be quick.—Ah ! there is no danger," added the girl, mistaking the cause of her companion's hesitation.

"I am not afraid ; I was merely thinking of the sad story of this place," said Ethel with a shudder that she could not repress. And passing over the boulders of loose rock, they entered, Indian file, into the Hunger Hole.

CHAPTER XI.

THE HUNGER HOLE.

ETHEL, on following her young pupil through the darkling portal of the cave, moved forward at first with extreme precaution ; but gradually, as her eyes became accustomed to the dim mysterious light that reigned within, she could distinguish that the grotto really did increase in height within two paces of the entrance, and that it was quite possible to stand upright without inconvenience beneath the rocky roof. She saw that she was in a natural cavern of small dimensions, the irregular level of

the floor being moistened by the water that oozed through a crevice between two mossy stones and trickled onwards until it fell, with a monotonous dripping sound, into a chasm some ten or eleven feet in breadth, over which a wooden bridge, the timbers of which were black with age and coated with colourless growths of fungi and mosses, afforded the means of passing.

“They say the Hunger Hole was known and used from very early times,” observed Lady Alice, stepping fearlessly upon the dilapidated bridge, of which the hand-rails, if such there had been, had long since rotted away. “But its very existence was kept secret by the Morfords of Morford and two or three other families of the neighbouring gentry and their trusty retainers, until

after that sad tragedy of which I told you. You will find the inner chamber more comfortable than the outer cave, where the spring is."

And indeed Ethel found herself in a recess, somewhat smaller than the exterior portion of the cavern, but dry, and free alike from trickling moisture and the unwholesome growth of cryptogams, that carpeted the slimy floor of the ante-chamber through which they had passed. At one extremity of the chamber a sort of bench or bed-place had been cut, evidently by human agency, in the stony wall. Light came filtered down through boughs and creeping-plants from above the chasm, where a glimpse of the sky might be caught; while beneath, some subterranean pool or streamlet, to judge

by the drip, drip, of the water that ran over the mossy lip of the fissure, certainly existed.

"Life must have been very dreary here; spent in solitude, and with the haunting apprehension that at each instant the secret of the hiding-hole might be betrayed or discovered," said Ethel, again shivering, as though the air of the cave had been icy cold. "It would be almost better to face any danger than to linger"—

A sudden creaking and cracking, as of breaking wood-work, interrupted Ethel's speech, and was instantly followed by a dull heavy plunge, and then a splashing sound, as though something weighty had fallen from a considerable height into water below.

“ Good heavens, the bridge—the bridge ! ”

Such were the words that rose simultaneously to the lips of both the girls, and by a common impulse pupil and governess hurried to the verge of the abyss. Their instinct of alarm had been but too accurate in divining what had occurred. The bridge—the rotten old timbers of which had for centuries been exposed to the corroding influence of time and decay—had disappeared into the depths below, and now an impassable chasm yawned between the young explorers of the cave and the doorway by which they had entered it. They fell back and looked at one another with white, scared faces.

Ethel was the first to recover her self-command. “ This is awkward,” she said,

trying to smile, "for we shall be late in reaching High Tor, and I am afraid the Countess will be anxious. Of course, as soon as it is known that we have not returned to the farm where the carriage and pony were left, search will be made."

"No one will think of looking here," returned young Lady Alice, with a disconsolate shake of the head. "We are fully two miles from the Stannaries, and everybody will suppose that we have returned thence by the footpath that crosses Bramberry Common, or the Bridle-road that skirts Otter Pool and the Red Rock—short-cuts both of them, and favourite paths of mine, as is known. I am, unlucky, a wilful child, and have a sad character for roving over hill

and dale, so that even Mamma will not be frightened at the first. And — and, another thing that is bad. Nobody will suspect us of crossing Bitternley Swamp, even in fine weather, without a gentleman, or a man of some sort, to take care of us in case of need. The truth is, Miss Gray, it was a silly thing to do, a fool-hardy trick to play even on a day like this; for lives have been lost there often, as all on the moor know. We got across dry-footed or nearly so; but it might have been different. My brother said once, I was as bad to follow as a Will-o'-the-Wisp could be." The girl laughed, as though to reanimate her own drooping spirits, but the sullen echoes of the cave gave back the laughter hollowly.

"Can we not make some signal — call

aloud perhaps, to notify our plight to any who may be passing near?" asked Ethel, after a moment's consideration. But even as she spoke she felt the futility of the expedient she had suggested.

"Nobody may pass this way for weeks to come," said Lady Alice despondently. "You don't know, you can't guess, how very desolate Dartmoor is at most times. We might scream ourselves hoarse, without getting an answer from any voice but that of the peewit by day and the fern-owl by night. No; I was thinking I could perhaps get across."

But a deliberate survey of the chasm proved the hopelessness of such an attempt. A trained gymnast with nerves exceptionally steady could readily have taken the leap, although to slip or stumble was to incur a

certain and miserable death in the unseen waters below. But even the hardy maidens who tend their brass-belled kine among the Alpine pastures of Tyrol would have flinched from the effort to spring from one side of that yawning gulf to the other. Then for a time, a long time, there was silence, unbroken save by the regular plash and tinkle of the water, as it trickled over the floor of the outer cave and fell over into the black abyss below.

“They must surely take the alarm at High Tor,” said Ethel after a space. “There will be a hue-and-cry through all the neighbourhood. The worst that can happen will be that we may spend the night here, and be very cold and very hungry.”

“Hungry! Yes, we are likely to be

that, before we are found," half-petulantly interrupted Lady Alice. And then there was no more said for a longer time than before.

Ethel's mind was busy as she sat side by side with her pupil on the rough-hewn bench of stone that had been the death-bed of the luckless Jacobite refugee. How little had she thought, when listening an hour or two ago, to the legend of John Grahame's death, that she who told and she who hearkened to the tale would soon be shut up in that dismal lair, to suffer hardship, perhaps even to—— No, not to die, so near to home and friends; *that* was a supposition too wild to be harboured! They must be sought out, found, delivered from the prison to which accident had consigned them. Some one

would pass. Some one might even then be within hearing, and be rambling on, all-unconscious of the predicament of those within. So strongly did the idea that friendly ears might be near present itself to Ethel, that she started to her feet, calling aloud again and again for help. The hollow echoes of the cave returned the sound, as though in mockery, while Lady Alice sat mute and listless on the rocky bench. Presently she too sprang up. "I cannot bear it," cried the young girl, in her quick impetuous way. "I would sooner run the risk of fifty deaths than remain here, listening to the dreadful drip, drip, of the water as it falls into the pool or the brook beneath. We can't, now the bridge is gone, cross the fissure. But perhaps, if you would help me,

I might manage to scramble to the top of the rocks above here where the light comes down, and at any rate wave a handkerchief, or do something to attract attention if any one comes near."

Ethel glanced up at the ragged rocks draped with weed and bramble, and then down at the gaping chasm, into which a false step would probably hurl any aspirant who should prove unequal to the attempt.

"It is for me to try it, my dear, not you," she said quietly, but with a resolution that was not to be shaken. "I am taller and stronger; and besides, how could I meet the Countess again if I allowed you to run into a danger I shrank from?" And without further prelude Ethel grasped a tough tendril of the ivy that hung within reach, and by

climbing to every crevice or angle of the rock that could yield support to foot or hand, succeeded in gaining a ledge of stone, above which a tall slender hazel shot up into the free air. But to climb the few feet of bare stone above her was impossible. "It is idle ; I cannot do it," she said sadly.

It did indeed begin to seem a hopeless case, that is supposing that young Lady Alice was correct in her estimate of the loneliness of the spot and of the unlikelihood of succour.

"I cannot reach the top ; the rock is as steep as a wall," said Ethel, again looking down from amidst the ferns and foxgloves, the ivy trails and ropes of bramble, that half-filled the aperture.

"That tall nut-tree, it is close to your

hand," cried the quick-witted young damsel below. "Could you not pull it towards you, tie your handkerchief to the topmost bough, and let it spring up again? That would give us a chance, should any one come near."

With some difficulty Ethel succeeded in grasping the tough stem of the tall hazel, and bending it until she was able to make fast her handkerchief, as Alice had suggested, to the uppermost twigs. Up sprang the slender stem again the instant it was released, and the white pennon fluttered out, clear of the rocks, in the moorland breeze.

"We have hoisted our flag," said Lady Alice blithely, "to let them know we are at home." But as hour after hour went by, and the longed-for help came not, and

the increasing gloom of the faint cool light that filled the grotto told of the waning of the day, the spirits of Ethel's young charge lost their buoyancy.

"I wish at least," she said peevishly, "that tiresome dripping of the water would but stop. I feel as though it would drive me mad. Why not try the jump back over the chasm? Even if one fell in, it would be better so than to die by inches."

Ethel did her best to impart comfort. But her pupil would not be comforted.

"No, no!" she said repeatedly; "they will not find us till—till it is too late. The last place where any one would dream of looking is the Hunger Hole. It is so far off that nobody will imagine we walked all the way; and then, as none know of the

broken bridge, it will never occur to any one that we are shut up here. They will believe us to be drowned. It is not difficult to get smothered in a swamp hereabouts. And the pools will be dragged and the rivers examined, and still the riddle will remain unsolved."

Presently the girl crept up to Ethel's side and stole her hand into that of her governess. "I want you to forgive me, Miss Gray—Ethel dear," she said in a low voice. "It is my wilfulness that has been the cause of all."

Ethel answered her soothingly; and with a great sob young Lady Alice, who was no coward, kept down her rising tears. For an hour or more they sat silent, hand in hand.

“Do you remember,” whispered Alice De Vere, after a time, “an old, old song, *The Mistletoe Bough?* Maud sings it. I am afraid it will come true, for us, and the Hunger Hole will have a new story.”

CHAPTER XII.

FOUND.

By some seeming irony of Fate, it is when our fortunes have ebbed to their lowest, and all seems cold, bleak, and dreary in the threatening horizon before us, that light begins to break in upon the oppressive darkness. That we are never so likely to fall as when we deem ourselves to stand in boastful security, proud of our seeming strength, is a truth which the historical student will not be slow to recognise. Down comes the thunderbolt from a clear sky, toppling over to shameful ruin the

gilded image propped on feet of sorry clay. But there is a substratum of fact whereon is reared the homely proverb which declares that when things are at the worst they will mend.

For all that, we cannot wrap ourselves in a comfortable mantle of indolent fatalism, assured that our shortcomings will be compensated by some extraordinary turn of Fortune's wheel. It so happens that we are often too dull of vision to know the heavenly messenger when we see him. Our deaf ears fail to catch the strain of hope. We miss the tide that offered to bear our argosy to port. The grass grows, but the steed, all unwitting of the green meadow hard by, starves within a stone's throw of plenty. Chatterton was not the only one

who, goaded by despair, has taken the leap in the dark at the very moment when kind hands were held out to lead the truant into the goodly fellowship of honest men. A great hush and stillness had fallen upon those who were shut up in the Hunger Hole. There was that in the situation which forbade useless words. It was getting late. There was every probability of spending the night and the morrow in that dismal place. That amount of imprisonment entailed cold and misery, perhaps an attack of marsh-fever, since the air from Bitternley Swamp was likely to be fraught with the seeds of ague. But twenty-four hours—thirty-six hours—might not see the end of the captivity of Ethel and Lady Alice, and, in that case——

How strange that any one should run the risk of being starved to death, in this blatant nineteenth century of ours, when road and rail, gas and press, have opened up so many an old-world nook, and dragged so many an abuse into the killing light of day. Yet Dartmoor remains Dartmoor, and it is quite possible to be smothered in its snows, sunk in its swamps, or to wander among its blinding mists until the deadly chill of fatigue benumbs the wearied limbs, for there are wildernesses yet where Nature is more than a match for man.

The fickle beauty of the day had not lasted. Clouds went driving by; that much could be distinguished by gazing up through the narrow space which weeds and leaves left free. And presently it began to

rain, and the moaning wind grew shrill, and rushed with strange and mournful dissonance through the recesses of the cavern. "It is all my fault—mine!" sobbed Lady Alice, nestling at Ethel's side. "I would not say a word, before starting, about the Hunger Hole, for fear the elders should object; and now I am caught in my own trap. It's very hard on you, though, Miss Gray."

Ethel bore up bravely, but she was far from feeling the calm that she affected. Perhaps Lady Alice was too positive in her conviction of the hopelessness of their condition; but if the attention of the seekers were diverted into false channels, who could tell what might result before a happy accident should bring aid? It was for her

pupil that she feared, not for herself. In the event of long detention in that wretched place, a large-eyed, excitable slip of a girl, of high spirit but delicate temperament, could scarcely be expected to endure hardships which Ethel, in the bloom of perfect health, might be able to support. It was growing late, and perceptibly colder. Night would be upon them soon, and then——

And then the morrow would dawn laggingly, and hope would leap up a little at the sight of welcome daylight, and flag and droop as the hours went by and relief came not. That Lady Alice could live through a second night in that chill atmosphere of the cave, and without sustenance, Ethel did not believe.

“How cold it strikes!” said the young

girl, almost peevishly, as she shivered and pressed closer to Ethel. "I am afraid though," she added, more gently, after a while, "that we shall be colder yet before the end of this."

As the moaning wind swept by, and the patter of the rain that lashed the outer walls of the grotto grew louder, Ethel listened, with a sense of hearing which her anxiety had sharpened, for any sound that might indicate that help was near. But no! There was nothing to be distinguished save the beating of the rain, the mournful cadence of the wind, and the dull regular drip of the water that trickled from the spring, and fell deep down, to the hidden waters at the bottom of the abyss.

Was that the tread of a horse? Fancy

plays strange tricks with those who watch, but surely that sound resembled nothing so much as the quick beat of hoofs upon grass or heather. Then the sound ceased, and a long tantalising pause succeeded. Ethel began to imagine that her senses must have played her false. No; for the rattling of loose stones, disturbed by a human foot, at the outer portal of the Hunger Hole, came at last to confirm the first impression that a horse's tramp had really sounded near, and then a man's form darkened the doorway between the two caves.

“Alice, look up! We are found!” cried Ethel, starting from the rocky bench; and almost at the same instant a voice, the very sound of which sent the blood madly coursing through her veins, exclaimed:

"There *is* some one here then. Alice—Miss Gray, can it be you? Ah! I see how it is," added the speaker, as his further progress was barred by the gaping chasm, while his foot struck against a fragment of the broken bridge, yet clinging to its rusted holdfast in the rock. The voice was Lord Harrogate's.

"What good angel sent you to our help, brother?" said young Lady Alice, laughing and crying all at once, now that the tension of her overstrained nerves had slackened.

"She is a moorland angel, and here she is to answer for herself," returned the young man, as Betty Mudge, hot and panting, appeared beside him in the entrance of the cavern. "This good girl must have wings, I think, as well as a sharp pair of eyes.

She almost kept up with my horse as we crossed the moorland, avoiding Bitternley Swamp, where *Bay Middleton* could never have made his way over the treacherous peat-hags. I can guess, now, how this awkward business happened."

"But how to get at you, now I have found you!" added Lord Harrogate in some perplexity, after a pause. It was provoking, to be baffled by the eleven feet of sheer black emptiness that lay between the wet outer grotto and the dry inner compartment of the cave.

"Some one will perhaps arrive before long. A plank put across the gap would set us free," said Ethel, advancing to the edge of the chasm.

"I wanted to jump it, but Miss Gray

would not let me try," called out Lady Alice.

"And Miss Gray was quite right, Miss Madcap," answered her brother, scanning the width of the abyss. "An uglier jump, or a less inviting, I never saw—at all events for a young lady to venture on. The worst of it is, that nobody, excepting myself and this excellent Betty Mudge here, is in the secret of the Hunger Hole; so nobody is coming with ropes or planks or civilized contrivances of any sort. I have tied my horse to a bush below, just by the dead alder-tree; but I can't well make a suspension-bridge out of reins and saddle-girths, after all."

"Please ye, my lord," put in Betty, who had by this time recovered her breath—

“please ye, I might run across to Farmer Fletcher’s town, and ask him to get chaise ready for the ladies, and send some of his men with things ’cross Swamp.”

This was a very sensible proposition, for Mr. Fletcher was the farmer who dwelt on the ridge, and at whose ‘town’ or farmhouse, clustered round by cottages for the labourers who tilled the fields of that little oasis in the desert, the pony and wagonette had been left. The pony and wagonette had long since returned to High Tor in charge of the lad in the Earl’s livery, who had sounded the first note of alarm as to the probable fate of the missing ones; but the farmer possessed a green chaise and a serviceable cob to draw it, and would of course send over all that was needed.

"Better ask him then, from me, to send his chaise to the Crossroads, at the north end of the Heronmere. Bitternley Swamp will not be dry walking after the rain," said Lord Harrogate.

Betty vanished on her errand like a fog-wreath at sunrise.

"Now let me see what I can do single-handed towards the good work," said Lord Harrogate. "It strikes me that the withered tree I spoke of, close to which my nag is tethered, might do good service now. There is something ignominious in being balked by a ditch like that."

He went, and shortly returned, dragging after him the torn-up trunk of the alder of which he had spoken. Lady Alice clapped her hands. "I like a man to be strong!"

she said, applaudingly. Ethel said nothing, but her colour heightened and her eyes grew bright. All women do admire the manly virtues in a man, and strength, like courage and truth and wit, takes rank among them.

The uprooted alder-tree bridged the chasm, with some two feet to spare on each bank, and Lord Harrogate tested it with his foot, and assured himself that it would bear a considerable weight. With his handkerchief he tied one end of it tightly to the iron holdfast belonging to the broken bridge, and crossing with a light and elastic step to the other side, with no trifling difficulty persuaded the two girls to follow his example.

"I am afraid we were sad cowards," said Ethel, when at last the dreaded passage had

been effected, not very promptly or easily, for the narrow tree afforded but a sorry and unsteady foothold, and there was that in the recollection of the ghastly depth below, and the remembrance of the narrowness and slippery roundness of the crackling tree-trunk beneath the feet, that was not unlikely to affect feminine nerves. Yet, propped by Lord Harrogate's arm, and encouraged by Lord Harrogate's voice, with shut eyes and scarcely throbbing hearts, the two girls did manage to get across.

Then came the hasty traversing of the damp outer cave, the emerging into the fresh free air from what had seemed a grave closing its hungry jaws upon the living, and then the long walk through the brooding twilight to the north end of Heronmere,

where, thanks to the trusty Betty's winged feet, Farmer Fletcher's green chaise was in readiness to receive the two half-fainting girls, and where at length Lord Harrogate, who had hitherto led *Bay Middleton* by the bridle, as he walked beside the rescued prisoners of the Hunger Hole, was able to spring again into the saddle.

To Betty Mudge, as Lord Harrogate laughingly declared when he had escorted his sister and her governess safely back to High Tor, where the warmest welcome awaited those for whom the neighbourhood was already in full search, the whole credit of the rescue was due. Betty it was who, mushroom-gathering on the moor, had espied the signal of distress, Ethel's handkerchief fluttering from the slender top of the hazel-

tree that rose like a thin flagstaff above the rocks. Betty it was who, divining mischief where duller eyes might have seen nothing but a hazard or a frolicsome prank, had been making her way towards the Hunger Hole, when she caught sight of Lord Harrogate spurring across the moor in aimless quest of the missing ones. And if there could be faith put in the word of as worthy an Earl and as estimable a Countess as any in the peerage, the wind of adversity should never more be suffered to blow too bitinglly, for Betty's sake, on any of the Mudge family.

"I shall ask Morford, as a particular favour, not to repair that bridge," said Lord Harrogate jestingly. "No chance then that the Hunger Hole should turn again into a trap for catching young ladies."

CHAPTER XIII.

MAN PROPOSES.

"HARROGATE is going, you know, to leave us so very soon," Lady Maud De Vere had said, in her kindly matter-of-fact way, in the course of conversation with Ethel Gray ; and Ethel had turned away her face instinctively, lest the burning blush which rose there unbidden should betray her secret to her pupil's sister and her own friend. Poor Ethel had communed with her heart in the still hours of more than one night since the evening that had witnessed her release from the Hunger Hole, and she could not but

acknowledge to herself that she loved Lord Harrogate.

It was not a welcome conviction that forced itself gradually upon Ethel Gray. The attachment, hopeless as it perforce was, was a thing to be deplored, a misfortune ; not a source of joy. Lord Harrogate could be nothing to her. He was almost as remote from her humble sphere of life as a Prince of the blood-royal would have been. There are girls who know, where their own personal vanity is at stake, no distinction of ranks, and would set their caps without compunction at an Emperor. Ethel was none of these. To fall in love, even with an object as hopelessly out of reach as one of the fixed stars would be, is a forlorn privilege which has been claimed in every age by very

humble persons of either sex. But to Ethel's proud, maidenly heart it was pain, not pleasure, to know that the future Earl, the future master of High Tor, had grown to be dearer to her than was well for her peace of mind. That she was in his eyes merely Miss Gray, his sister's governess, was to her thinking a certainty. And she did not even wish that it were otherwise. Why should there be two persons unhappy, on such a subject, instead of one? It was much better as it was. She had begun to love him before, in that desolate cavern on the moor, he had appeared as the harbinger of safety. But she had not admitted to herself that this was so, until the whirl of strong feelings consequent on the danger and the deliverance had taught her to read her own heart,

and to learn that his image was garnered in its innermost core. And now he was going away, going very soon. Well, it was better so. A young man such as he was could not always be expected to linger in a country-house. He was going, and she should see him no more. Doubtless it was for the best.

She was in the garden, and alone. A governess is seldom alone. But lessons were over for the day ; and Lady Alice her pupil was upstairs finishing a sketch, and Ethel had strayed out into what, from some household tradition of a foreign florist who had been invoked, when Anne was Queen, to shape and stock the flower-beds and to trim the luxuriant holly-hedge into Netherlandish neatness, was called the Dutch garden. A pleasant spot it was, with its wealth of

fragrant old-fashioned roses and gorgeous display of variegated tulips, screened by the immemorial holly-hedge from the rude north-east wind.

Quite suddenly, as she reached the other end of the holly-hedge, Ethel looked up at the rustle of the crisp green leaves, against which some one or something had brushed in passing, and her eyes met those of Lord Harrogate. The latter lifted his hat, but did not immediately speak, while Ethel neither spoke nor stirred. When the thoughts have been busy in conjuring up the image of a particular person, and the original of the air-drawn portrait appears, a kind of dreamy appreciativeness, which is of all sensations the most unlike to surprise, is apt to result. It was so in this

case; and for a few brief instants Ethel looked at Lord Harrogate as she would have looked at his picture on the wall.

"I thought I might find you here," said Lord Harrogate, dissolving the spell by the sound of his voice. "I hoped I should," he added, in a lower and more meaning tone. Ethel murmured something, stooping as she did so to lift the drooping tendril of a standard rose-tree beaten down by the heavy rain of yesterday. "Can you guess at all, Miss Gray," continued the young man, with an evident effort to speak carelessly and confidently, "why I wanted to find you here—and alone?"

It was not quite a fair question. Ethel, in her simple honesty, not caring to enter on a course of that verbal fencing which comes

so naturally to a woman whose heart has not yet learned to speak, made no reply. Her colour deepened, and she became very intent indeed upon the bruised trail of the rose-tree.

“I am going away, as you know, and that very soon. My plans for the winter are quite undecided. I may not be back at High Tor for a good while,” said the heir to that mansion.

Now there were to be certain autumn manœuvres in the open country near Aldershot Camp, in which that regiment of militia in which Lord Harrogate was a captain, and towards the perfection of whose drill and discipline he was thought to have contributed more than most militia officers find it convenient to do, had been selected to

figure among the auxiliary forces on that occasion.

"Some friends want me," explained Lord Harrogate, "when our amateur soldiering is over, to go with them on a yacht-cruise in the Mediterranean, and so on to Egypt, and perhaps further. What I choose will very much depend on you, Miss Gray."

"On me!" She could not avoid answering, this time, and her tone was one of genuine surprise. "On me, Lord Harrogate!"

"On you. I should like all my plans to have some reference to you—Ethel!" said the young man, trying to get a full view of the beautiful blushing face that was half averted. "I say again, can you guess why?"

"Do not ask me to guess," returned

Ethel, with a trembling lip. She was very much frightened. She had not the least experience in that science of flirtation in which the modern young lady graduates so early. But she divined that words had been said which rendered it necessary that other words should be spoken, and with what result! Could it be that the end of the interview would be the dashing down of the half-idolised image that her fancy had set up as the emblem of pure chivalry?

“Only because I love you—love you very dearly, Ethel!” said the heir of High Tor; and as he spoke he took her unresisting hand in his and drew her towards him. For a moment Ethel was spell-bound, her whole faculties absorbed in the one fact that he had told her that he loved her. Come what

might, those words — those dear delicious words had sunk into her ear, and the memory of them must remain to the end of what would very likely be a lonely, loveless life ; a treasure, her very own, of which none could rob her ! But in the next minute Ethel drew her hand away from the hand that held it, and the crimson of indignant anger mounted to her cheek.

“ My Lord,” she said, in a voice that all her wish to speak and act calmly could not render quite steady, “ you should not have done this. I could not have believed it of you. It is not generous. It is not like yourself.”

“ Why not ? ” Lord Harrogate blundered out the words awkwardly enough ; but Ethel misunderstood him.

"Because," she said firmly, "my position beneath your mother's roof, in its very lowliness, ought to have been my protection from insult, which"——

"Insult!" flashed out Lord Harrogate, reddening too, and breaking almost roughly in on the girl's half-uttered speech. "Can you deem that I mean to insult you when I tell you of my love—that I speak insolently, Miss Gray, when I ask you to be my wife?"

Ethel quivered from head to foot as her half-incredulous ears drank in the words. "You meant—that is"—— she faltered out feebly.

"I meant this," said Lord Harrogate earnestly. "Miss Gray—Ethel, darling, I have learned during the time that I have known you, to love you with a true and

honest love. I am a clumsy wooer, I dare say, but surely you cannot have deemed that I had any other thought than that of asking you, for weal and woe, to share my fortunes?"

He tried to take her hand; but she eluded his grasp, and covering her face, sobbed aloud.

"Come, Ethel, come, my love! Let it be mine to dry those tears!" said the young man, passing his arm round her waist; but gently and firmly she released herself.

"You have made me very happy and very miserable all at once, my Lord," she said, turning round and facing him; "but believe me, there must be no more of this. I thank you from my heart for the very great compliment of your preference for a

girl so humbly born, without fortune or kindred. But I am your sister's governess ; and it shall never be said that Ethel Gray brought disunion and sorrow upon the noble family that had received her with so kindly a welcome. I have my own ideas of right and wrong, Lord Harrogate, and I know that I should be mean and base, even in my own eyes, were I to avail myself of—your great goodness.”

He was taken by surprise. He had made up his mind, and reckoned the difficulties of the step which he proposed to take. That he would meet with some opposition on the part of his family he was of course aware. It might take much time and much persuasion to bring his parents, and especially the Countess, to consent to a match so little

calculated to advance his worldly prospects. But he was no shallow boy to cry for his toy, and then forget the bauble that had been withheld from him. His offer of marriage would no doubt render Ethel's position at High Tor for a time untenable. He had thought the matter over. There were relatives of the De Vere's who, without being partisans of the match, would willingly offer a temporary home to such a girl as Ethel Gray, while his mother and Lady Gladys were in process of being converted to see the matter as he saw it.

Ethel's unlooked-for opposition disconcerted all these projects. She was very grateful, gentle, and almost submissive in her bearing; but she was as steadfast as adamant on the point that it behoved her to

return a respectful refusal to Lord Harrogate's proposals.

"Do not tempt me," she said more than once; "do not urge me to forfeit my self-respect, or be false to those who have put trust in me. I am no fit match for the future master of High Tor, the future Earl of Wolverhampton. Would the kind Countess have received me here, would Lady Maud have given me her friendship, had they dreamed of this?"

She was very firm. She let him infer, if he chose, that he was not indifferent to her; but to none of his instances would she yield her steady conviction that duty forbade her to say "Yes" to his entreaties. He became—small blame to him for being so—almost angry, and tried if reproach would succeed

where prayer and argument had failed. In vain. His reproaches brought the tears to Ethel's eyes, but she never faltered in her resolve.

If he pressed her unduly on this point, she said, simply, that she must go away. Let him forget her, or learn, as she hoped he would, to regard her as a friend, and then she need not leave High Tor. And then——

And then Lady Alice, Ethel's pupil, made her appearance, and there was no more opportunity for private conversation; and, two days later, Lord Harrogate started for Aldershot.

CHAPTER XIV.

TO REMIND.

"GENTLEMAN—that is, person—wanted most particularly to know — please to see him, Sir Sykes!" deferentially hinted the under-butler, sliding on noiseless feet up to the angle of his master's library. "He was very pressing—sent in card," continued the man, slurring over the words he uttered with that inimitable slipperiness of diction of which the English, and indeed Cockney man-servant possesses the monopoly, and which seems obsequiously to suggest rather than boldly to announce. Sir Sykes looked up in some surprise.

"Did he mention what he wanted?" he asked.

"No, Sir Sykes," replied the under-butler, edging the emblazoned tray, on which lay the card, a little nearer, as an experienced angler might bring his bait within striking distance of the pike that lay among the weeds.

"You may show him in—here," said Sir Sykes, as, without taking the card, he read the name upon it, and which was legibly inscribed in a big, bold, black handwriting. With a bow the under-butler withdrew to execute his master's orders.

Great people—and a baronet of Sir Sykes Denzil's wealth and position may for all practical purposes be classed among the great of the earth—are proverbially difficult

of access. It is the business of those about them to hedge them comfortably in from flippant or interested intrusions which might ruffle the golden calm of their existence; and suspicious-looking strangers by no means find the door of such a mansion as Carbery, as a rule, fly open at their summons.

The man who had on this occasion affected an entry was not one of those whose faces are their best letters of recommendation. The card he had given bore the name of Richard Hold, and under ordinary circumstances, such a caller as the mariner would never have succeeded in being put into communication with a higher dignitary than the house-steward or the groom of the chambers. However, by a judicious mixture of bribing and bullying, the visitor had induced the

under-butler to do his errand. Under certain circumstances, half a sovereign is a sorry douceur, even to an under-butler, but when tendered in company with enigmatical threats of 'starting with a rope's end,' by a seafaring personage of stalwart build and resolute air, such a coin becomes doubly efficacious as a persuader.

Richard Hold, master mariner, came in with a curious gait and mien, half-slinking, half-swaggering, like a wolf that daylight has found far from the forests and among the haunts of men. He was dressed in very new black garments, 'shore-going clothes,' as he would himself have described them; and the hat that he carried in his hand was new and tall and hard. He had even provided himself with a pair of gloves, so

desirous was he to omit no item of the customary garb of gentlemen ; but these he carried loose, instead of subjecting his strong brown fingers to such unwonted confinement.

“ I cannot say that I expected this honour, Mr. Hold,” said the baronet, stiffly motioning his unwelcome visitor to a seat.

“ ’Tis likely not,” coolly returned the adventurer, as he took a survey of the apartment. “ This sort of place, I don’t mind admitting, is a cut, or even two cuts above me. Still, business is business, Sir Sykes Denzil, Baronet, and has got to be attended to, I reckon, even in such a gen-teel spot as this is, mister ! ”

There must be something in the American twang and the American forms of speech which all the world over hits the fancy of

British-born rovers of Hold's caste, for in every quarter of the globe our home-reared rovers affect the idiom, and sometimes the accent, of Sam Slick's countrymen.

"I am scarcely aware, Mr. Hold," said the baronet with cold politeness, "what business it can be to which I am indebted for the favour of your company, to-day."

"Aren't you, though, skipper?" echoed Hold, whose natural audacity, for a moment repressed by the weight as it were of the grandeur around him, began to assert itself afresh. "Well, let every fellow paddle his own canoe and shoe his own mustangs. The question is, Are you dealing fairly by me or are you not, Sir Sykes Denzil, Baronet?"

"I assure you that you are talking Greek to me," said the master of Carbery Chase,

with a tinge of colour rising to his pale face.

"A nod," persisted Hold, "is as good every bit as a wink—you know the rest of it, mister. But since you want plain speaking, you shall have it. You can't have forgot, no more than I can, that our bargain was just this: A certain young lady was to be married to a certain young gentleman."

"I apprehend that you allude to—to my ward—Miss Ruth Willis," said the baronet hesitatingly.

"You've hit it exactly," exclaimed Hold, with a slap of his hard hand upon the crown of his hard hat, which sounded like a muffled drum, somewhat to the discomfiture of its proprietor, who eyed its ruffled surface ruefully. "When is the wedding to come off?"

Sir Sykes contemplated his ruffianly visitor with a disgust which it required all his prudence to dissemble.

"In civilised society," he said coldly, "events of that sort do not take place with quite so expeditious a disregard of difficulties as your very apposite question suggests. In the backwoods it is perhaps otherwise."

"In the backwoods," roughly retorted Hold, "we don't shilly-shally about righting a wrong, no more than about the marrying of a young couple that hev made up their minds to it. And let me tell you, Sir Sykes Denzil, Baronet, the superfine Saxony you fine gentlemen wear covers bigger rogues, often, than ever did the deerskin hunting-shirt with its Indian embroidery of wampum and coloured quills.

Backwoodsmen! I've been in white-fisted company less to be trusted than theirs."

Sir Sykes had imbibed too much of the spirit of that modern civilised society of which he spoke, to be readily nettled into a burst of anger by such taunts as these. Cool, save for one moment, from the first, the temperature of his calmly flowing blood seemed to grow more frigid as Hold's warmed.

"You have, I assure you, Mr. Hold, no cause whatever for irritation," he said smoothly: "I mean—to use your own expression, which I willingly adopt—fairly by you. I neither repudiate nor ignore our tacit compact. It is my dearest wish that my son should become the husband of the exemplary young lady in whose prosperity you interest yourself."

Hold gave a growl such as a bear, suddenly mollified by the gift of a glittering slice of toothsome honeycomb, might be expected to emit. His distrustful eye ranged over the baronet's plausible face, as though to test the sincerity of the assurance which had just been given.

"We're in the same boat," he said, in a tone that, if dogged, was less surly than before. "Our pumpkins, I guess, ought to go to the same market, they ought. But fair words don't put fresh butter into a dish of boiled batatas. I'm a British bull-dog of the game old breed," he added gruffly; "and I keep the grip, however I'm handled. Is there a likelihood of the marriage coming off soonish?"

"I hope so," returned Sir Sykes. He

would have given much to have avoided the slight embarrassment which he was conscious that his manner indicated, and which was not lost upon Hold's watchful eye.

"No day fixed? No banns put up—stop! I forgot—you swells marry by special license of the Archbishop of Canterbury—no cake ordered; no fal-lals bespoken from the milliner; no breakfast; no orange-flowers, eh? Well, I wish to be reasonable about it, Sir Sykes, but there must be an end of this. Do the young people understand one another, or do they not?"

"It does not answer to *brusquer* these things," returned Sir Sykes apologetically.

"It does not answer to *what?*" inter-

rupted Richard, to whose nautical ears the French word sounded odder than would have done a fragment of *lingua franca* or a scrap of Eboe or Mandingo.

"To be too precipitate," explained the baronet. "I have spoken to my son. He sees, I hope, the affair in a proper light. He is often in the society of Miss Willis, but—but"——

Sir Sykes wavered miserably here. All his deportment seemed to fail him before Hold's merciless eye, the very gaze of which probed him to the quick.

"Aren't you captain in your own ship?" asked the adventurer curtly.

The baronet winced at the question. Captain in his own ship, in the sense that some men are commanders at home, he had never

been. His own house, his own estate, had not from the first been managed in precise accordance with the views of him who owned them. But he had been a decorous captain, a captain who walked quarter-deck as solemnly as the greatest Tartar afloat, and who got lip-service and eye-service as a salve to his vanity, until quite recently.

Now there was a strong and not altogether an obedient hand on the helm. A new broom was making, in the person of Enoch Wilkins, attorney-at-law, a clean sweep of various time-honoured abuses such as always do grow up about a great estate, and the wails of the indignant sufferers could not always be kept from reaching the reluctant ears of Sir Sykes. People who were docked of perquisites came in

respectful bitterness of soul to the baronet, and humbly prayed that he would take their part as against Wilkins the lawyer and Abrahams the steward.

Captain in his own ship ! The word was a telling one, and it hit him hard. He was only captain in an ornamental sense, because Carbery was his freehold, and the baronetcy his, and he alone could sign receipts and draw cheques. He had loved his ease much ; and now it was perpetually invaded. He was sorry for dismissed gamekeepers, and for tenants whose tenure was to expire on Lady-day. He gave them drafts on his banker as a plaster for the smart which he nevertheless felt sure was deserved. An unrespecting City solicitor, and the sharp London Jew whom Mr. Wilkins had in-

ducted into the stewardship, were swelling the rent-roll in despite of the feeble protests of the nominal lord of all.

“I cannot compel Captain Denzil to take a wife of my choosing; that is beyond the power of a modern English father, at least where sons are concerned,” said Sir Sykes with a sickly smile.

“No; you can’t do that, skipper. To knot the ninetailed cat and give the young fellow six dozen for mutiny,” said Hold, chuckling over the imaginary scene, “would be too strict discipline for mealy-mouthed days like these. But you might let him have it, Sir Sykes, though not quite so downright. Make him understand that his allowances and his liberty all depend on good behaviour, and then see what comes of it.”

What Sir Sykes suffered during the delivery of this speech, could only be inferred from the fact that his lips became of a bluish white and that he drew his breath gaspingly.

“Believe me, Mr. Hold,” he said in a thin broken voice, which gained strength somewhat as he proceeded, “you may intrust the care of carrying out your wishes—that is, our wishes—to me. I understand my son best, and I”——

He stopped again, gasping for breath, and the lines about his mouth, traced by pain, were visible enough to attract the notice of his unscrupulous guest.

“You shall have time, Sir Sykes Denzil, Baronet,” he said apologetically; “take a fortnight if you like. I’m to be heard of

meanwhile at old Plugger's;" and he threw the card of that establishment on the table.

Then Sir Sykes rang the bell for wine, and the wine was brought. Hold tossed off a bumper of sherry.

"Your health, skipper," he said; "and success to the wedding." And so, with an impudent leer, he picked up his tall shining hat, and departed.

CHAPTER XV.

A DIFFERENCE OF OPINION.

"It can't be done, sir, at the price. I'd do a good deal to meet your wishes and that, and I don't pretend to be more sentimental than my neighbours. But marrying is a serious sort of step, you know. One can't cry off and pay forfeit, if one changes one's mind a bit too late. Miss Willis is"——

Thus far Captain Denzil; but now Sir Sykes interrupted his son with an irritation unusual to him: "Miss Willis is a great deal too good for you, I am afraid. Indeed, I trust to her sound sense to keep some order

in your affairs, and prevent you from driving at too headlong a pace along the road to ruin. Of course her pretensions to pedigree are very slight compared with our own, if that be the obstacle in your way."

"Nobody cares much about ancient blood, in a woman at least, now-a-days," languidly replied Jasper. "She is lady enough to take the head of a dinner-table, or figure creditably in a London drawing-room, after a few weeks of training, and that's as much as need be looked for. And I admit that Miss Willis is—very clever."

Except in the case of an authoress, no one ever applies the epithet 'Very clever' to a lady save as a species of covert blame. Sir Sykes felt and looked uneasy as the words reached him.

“If you have any personal objection”
—— he began.

“Not the least in the world,” unceremoniously interrupted Jasper. “I’ll even stretch a point, and say I rather like the girl than otherwise. She’d go straight, I daresay, once the course was smooth and clear before her. But I do not think, father, you are treating me quite well. Carbery ought, you know it ought, to go in the direct line, as such properties do.”

“I apprehend your meaning,” returned Sir Sykes in his coldest tone, “to be that you resent as a grievance the fact that the estate is not entailed upon yourself. You should be more reasonable, and remember the singular circumstances under which I became master here.”

"It was a grand *coup*!" exclaimed the captain, with an envious little sigh. "Such a stroke of luck does not come twice to the same family."

"I got this great gift," pursued Sir Sykes, "from the hand of one who thought less of what he gave to me than of what, by making such a will, he took away from others. The old Lord's self-tormenting mind led him to exult, in the hopes that his testament extinguished, in the injury done to kith and kin."

"It was a sell for the De Veres," muttered Jasper; "they didn't on the whole take it badly." He looked up as he spoke at the glimmering blazonry of the great stained-glass window, and realized, for the first time perhaps, the vexation which the

caprice of the late lord of Carbery had inflicted on those of his own race and name.

"The property," said Sir Sykes, "having become my own a score of years ago, is mine to give or to withhold at my death, as in my lifetime I may judge fitting."

"You have told me that, sir, pretty often," retorted Jasper testily; "of course it's yours, and you can leave it to the Foundling Hospital if you like."

"Common policy then would dictate," said Sir Sykes with deliberate emphasis, "the study of my wishes. And I wish very much indeed that Miss Willis should become your wife."

"I can't, as I said, do it at the price; really I can't," rejoined Jasper sullenly, as he thrust his hand into a side-pocket and

fingered the cigar-case that lay there. He did not dare to light a cigar in the library, much as he longed to seek solace in smoke; but he grew impatient for the interview to come to an end, and to recover his freedom.

"I offered a handsome income," said Sir Sykes with an offended look. "Had not the sum proposed proved sufficient, that was a difficulty not insuperable. You had the option of beginning married life with the revenue of an average baronet."

"Yes; but you see, sir, you are a trifle above the mark of an average baronet," responded the captain; "and I naturally should like when my turn comes—I hope it will be a long time first—to fill the same position. A bare allowance, or a lump of

settled money, won't make me the equal of an ordinary eldest son; and I don't see why, since by accident I'm not on a par with other fellows of my nominal rank and prospects, and I am required to marry without being allowed to choose for myself, I should not be put on a level with men of my own standing."

Sir Sykes fidgeted restlessly in his chair, and the lines of pain about his mouth, which grew more sharply defined every day, deepened almost perceptibly.

"Consider what you are asking of me," he said with an injured air; "to make myself a mere tenant for life where I have been for twenty years owner in fee-simple! Sons do not ask their fathers to entail an estate for their benefit."

"I don't see why I should be in a worse position than other fellows," sullenly responded Jasper. "I may have been extravagant and that sort of thing ; but there's no reason why my extravagances should be totted up against me to a heavier sum-total than those of twenty I could name. Hookham, now, who let his father in for a hundred and eleven thousand the year that the French horse Plon-Plon won the Derby, is as safe of the Snivey estates as he is of the Snivey peerage."

"The Earl of Snivey and his prodigal heir Lord Hookham," answered Sir Sykes with cold urbanity, "do not present a case, to my mind, precisely in point. You cannot in reason expect me, after the sacrifices I have already made on your behalf, to

place you in the position, as you call it, of heir of entail. I am speaking to you less as a father than as a man of the world."

"And as a man of the world, sir," said the incorrigible Jasper, "I trust you will excuse my saying that I scarcely care to be huddled and hustled into marrying I don't know whom, unless at a very heavy figure, as my stock-broker, when I was fool enough to go on the Exchange, and burned my fingers over time-bargains, used to say. I can't think why you should mind my coming next, as concerns Carbery Chase here."

This was a home question which, if arraigned before the stern tribunal of Minos and Rhadamanthus, Sir Sykes would not have found it easy to answer. He was in

the habit of telling himself that Jasper was not a successor to whom the honour and welfare of a great family could with prudence be intrusted. Were he master, the old oaks in the Chase might soon be gambled down from their prescriptive loftiness, and mortgages might spring up like mushrooms. Here was a noble estate unencumbered, like some big diamond without a flaw to mar its lustre, and he was asked to let his spendthrift son inherit as of right. There were Lucy and Blanche to be provided for. They would marry, doubtless, and their husbands would probably expect that the brides' hands should be heavy with much gold. The bulk of the property would devolve on Captain Denzil; but then it might be tied up with an ingenious testamentary rigour that should

keep the future baronet in legal leading-strings through life. Sir Sykes cherished too lively a recollection of the shifts and straits of his own outlawed progenitor Sir Harbottle, to wish the reins of government to pass unreservedly into Jasper's unsteady hands.

But Sir Sykes had an unavowed motive for rejecting his son's proposition. He was by no means sure how Enoch Wilkins of St. Nicholas Poultney would receive such a suggestion. Mr. Wilkins, that over-zealous pilot, who had insisted on assuming the guidance of affairs, might be furious at hearing that Jasper was to be promoted from heir-presumptive to heir-apparent. There was no alliance between the captain and the shrewd turf-lawyer, from whom so much of

his lightly expended cash had been extracted. Jasper by no means relished the elevation of Mr. Wilkins to be his father's Mentor and right-hand man. Mr. Wilkins might guess that Sir Jasper would send his japanned deed-boxes elsewhere than to St. Nicholas Poultney. And yet Sir Sykes could not venture to offend Mr. Wilkins.

The conversation was protracted for some half-hour or more, since Sir Sykes was sincerely desirous to carry his point; but it languished by degrees, and involved, as conversations on important topics are in real life apt to do, frequent repetitions of some stock phrase or threadbare argument. Sir Sykes essayed threats, veiled ones of course, and not very comprehensible even to himself. Jasper, however, was very little moved by

such threats. There are things that a gentleman cannot do, and assuredly one of them is to turn his only son out of doors because he declines a wife of the parent's choosing. And to no other menace was the captain amenable. He should probably, as a result of his father's displeasure, get no cheques for the next few months ; but this stoppage of pocket-money could not much affect the happiness of a graceless prodigal who, had he once got a sufficient sum in his possession, would have turned his back at once on Carbery and all that belonged thereto.

Jasper, then, was singularly stubborn. He was in general as morally pliable as a jelly-fish, after the fashion of most so-called men of pleasure, but now he seemed for the nonce to have developed a backbone, and to be

hard to bend. There was really some lurking sense of injury at his heart, and he felt on better terms with his own conscience than was often the case, as he resisted his father's instances that he should marry Miss Willis, commence housekeeping on five thousand a-year, and be a reformed character as well as a Benedict. He felt that all was not right, and was assured that a bride worth the taking would not be urged on his acceptance with such pertinacity.

"I do not see," repeated Jasper again and again, "why I should be in a worse position than other fellows."

From that formula, behind which, as behind a breastwork, he strongly intrenched himself, nothing could drive him. It was not, as he explained with almost unnecessary

candour, that he had any undue delicacy with regard to mercenary marriages; but that which he stipulated for was to be on a level with other spendthrifts of his own degree and set, with young Lord Hookham, with Lionel Rattlebury, and wild Lord Viscount Squandercash, and the rest. Entail the estate, so that it *must* pass to him, Jasper, and post-obits would become practicable, and money be easily raised; and then Miss Willis was welcome to be the partner of his joys and sorrows—such was Jasper's simple train of reasoning. It was a heavy price, but he stood out for it.

Sir Sykes was not willing to pay the price, at the cost, it might be, of a second contest with Mr. Enoch Wilkins, and the negotiation with his son came to no satis-

factory conclusion. What was to be done? Hold had named a fortnight as the period of grace that he was disposed to grant; but the baronet was of opinion that it would not be politic to allow the time to expire without communicating with this man—who was in some sense his master. He would inform Hold of Captain Denzil's unexpected obstinacy, and plead for a further delay, and—yes—he would send money. Money has often a wonderfully lenitive effect upon the temper, and its softening effects should be tried upon this buccaneering fellow.

Sir Sykes penned his letter, touching as lightly as he could on Jasper's recalcitrancy, and expressing sanguine hopes for the future. He said nothing about the entail, which had been the subject of the haggling debate

between himself and the captain. It would hardly be prudent to tell Hold of that, lest Jasper should find an unexpected ally to back his demand.

“We had better, under the circumstances, give him, as I believe whale-fishers say, a little more line,” wrote Sir Sykes in his confidential communication to Richard Hold, and he was weak enough to pride himself on his neat use of a nautical metaphor sure to tell with a seafaring man. And he signed a cheque for two hundred and fifty pounds, payable to Mr. Richard Hold, or order, and inserted it in the letter, which he despatched by that night’s post. He could scarcely have done a more foolish thing.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN WOOLMER FOREST.

"BEATEN, decidedly beaten, bad luck to them ! The only chance Sir David has left is to slip off in the night, grope for a ford higher up the stream, and pass his artillery over as best he may. I could lay a wager that he tries it."

"Not he," returned a gruffer voice. "Moffat's too wary to be caught napping. The sly old fox was almost too many for us though, when he made that forced march, and all but captured the bridge by a swoop of his cavalry."

"Ah!" chimed in a third officer of the group now eating a hurried supper around a bivouac fire, the glow of which was doubly welcome from the fact that the uniforms of all present had been drenched and soaked with the heavy rain that had fallen that day—"Ah! tell it not in Gath; but it was the quickness of those militia fellows—the Devon Light Infantry, or whatever they call themselves—that saved us. The enemy's cavalry were just clattering over the bridge, when that militia regiment threw out its skirmishers, in very smart style too, and saved the chief from a checkmate."

"That was Harrogate's doing," observed the first speaker; "he's their acting-major just now, and I saw him on horse-back at the bridge-foot. A first-rate fellow he is,

and could teach a lesson to some of our pompous bigwigs in cocked-hat and feather. All the same, I'd not work as he does, if I were a lord."

"You had better leave off chattering, you youngsters, and get forty winks," said the good-natured senior with the gruff voice. "It's ten to one Moffat has us under arms and on the march a good hour before day-break. I learned his ways in India, when we were following Tantia Topee and the Nana up hill and down dale. As for me, I've the rounds to-night, and —— Well, sergeant; what is it?" he added, as he tightened his belt.

"A civilian, sir, that wants to be passed to the quarters of an officer of the Devon militia, on important business, he says. He

has come in a gig from Downton, and the picket stopped him on the Whiteparish road."

"It's a spy of old Sir David's!" exclaimed one of the subalterns, jumping to his feet; "one of the enemy in plain clothes sent to reconnoitre within our lines. I suppose it wouldn't quite do to hang him, though!"

"A London tailor, more likely," said another of the young men, with a laugh. "Too bad, I call it, to be dunned down here, and pestered with bills, when one is wearing out one's uniform and wetting one's feet in the service of an ungrateful country. —What sort of man is he, sergeant?"

"A sailor-looking fellow, sir—from abroad, I should judge—dressed very respectable," returned the sergeant, again lifting his hand

to the peak of his cap. "It's Lord Harrogate he wants to see—on particular business, he says."

There was some little discussion as to whether the stranger should be allowed to proceed. Strictly speaking, every British subject has a right to go where he lists, within the four seas, upon a lawful errand ; but there are exceptions to this abstract right, in practice, if not in theory. This was one of them. The Autumn Manœuvres were going on, and two generals of great Indian renown, Sir David Roberts, and Lord Moffat, but lately promoted to the peerage on account of his long and good service, were pitted against one another in that larger *Kriegspiel* or game of war which we call a sham campaign.

Sir David commanded the 'enemy,' and his business was to get within striking distance of London, if his strategy should prove superior to that of his old comrade and rival. He was supposed to have landed a powerful foreign force at Poole, Weymouth, or Christchurch, and now to be pushing vigorously on, scattering the local levies as he came towards the capital. It was Lord Moffat's more popular task to defend London and beat back the invader to his ships.

There had been much marching and counter-marching. The forces employed, men and officers alike, had entered into the mimic contest with the heartiness of so many schoolboys intent upon their play. Their willing obedience knew no bounds. When the commissariat—as is the nature of

commissariats—was behind-hand with their food, they marched, dinnerless, and bore cheerfully every hardship that dust, rain, hunger, and fatigue could inflict. The men disguised their footsore condition that the regiment might have full ranks when the mock - fight should come. The officers scarcely grumbled over the heavy bills which the spoiling of their new uniforms entailed.

Lord Moffat, the national defender, to the great joy of his army and the delight of the newspaper correspondents, was getting the best of it. But the wily Sir David and his invading hordes had been within an ace, if not of victory, at least of that upper hand which goes far in sham war as in real war. By a stolen flank-march he had all but

captured the only available bridge across the Lene, on the swift stream and deep though narrow channel of which his veteran antagonist had relied perhaps a little too implicitly.

Sir David's Hussars and Lancers had come charging down upon the feebly guarded bridge across the Lene, unexpectedly, when every one in Lord Moffat's camp believed them to be miles away. Five minutes more of panic and indecision would have given up to the 'enemy' the hill-road that skirted the downs, and led direct to Aldershot and London. Luckily, the militia regiment posted nearest to the river was in a state of unusually stringent discipline, and had in Lord Harrogate an officer who could be cool and firm at a moment's warning. The

skirmishers of the regiment of which he was now acting-major had lined the bank with magical quickness, and the battalion had come swiftly on to pour blank-cartridge into the hostile squadrons. Horse, foot, and guns had come to the help of the men of Devon, and Sir David's daring onslaught had been repulsed.

All this sounds very childish, possibly, to those who, at a distance from the scene of strife, only read of it through the cold medium of printed words. But to those who took part in the fray and were all on fire with the keen contagion of the excitement, it was very real. So many stratagems were reputed to be in use for the obtaining of information, so much of the success of either friendly belligerent must depend on

secrecy as to his movements, that it is no wonder if a stranger was regarded with extreme suspicion when presenting himself at the outposts.

Had this stranger asked for a less popular officer than Lord Harrogate, it is probable that he would have met with every conceivable impediment in the further prosecution of his researches. But, apart from that shadowy halo of respect which, as such, still surrounds those born in the purple, Lord Harrogate was a man never named but with respect, and, on account of his service at the bridge, was the hero of the hour.

"I'll take him with me as far as the post of the Devon militia," said the gruff field-officer, who had now completed the tightening of his belt and the adjustment of his

cloak. "My orderly must look after him, sergeant."

Lord Harrogate, in the act of receiving the reports for the night, with some surprise beheld Richard Hold, master-mariner, marched up under escort to the door of his hastily-pitched tent. He knew the man at once. That sallow, swarthy countenance had attracted some notice in the quiet Devonshire country-side near High Tor.

"You want me, then, it seems, Mr. "—— began the future Earl of Wolverhampton.

"Hold, my Lord! Dick Hold, very much at your service!" returned the seaman, "if these chaps"—with a half-angry glance at the file of militia privates to left and right, and the pink-faced young corporal who, stiff

as a ramrod, commanded the guard—"would give a fellow breathing time."

At a sign from Lord Harrogate, the escort fell back, and Richard Hold was at liberty to speak. "Did your Lordship ever hear what happens to a pig when he swims?" asked the seaman abruptly; and without giving his auditor leisure to reply to the queer question, he resumed: "He cuts his throat, they say; and so do I, maybe, in speaking as I am going to do. I've been paid for silence until it goes agin me to speak, even to spoil the game of one who hasn't used me well."

Lord Harrogate, smiling, looked steadily at the man, and read a good deal of his character at a glance.

"Vain, shrewd, boastful, and a bully;"

such was his rapid summary of Hold's qualities ; "but with a stout heart to back his bullying, which is not a common conjunction. The fellow must be smarting under some sense of injury, or he would not be here."

He saw too that Mr. Hold was in that peculiar condition as to the effects of liquor which police constables delicately define when they say that the prisoner at the bar "had been drinking, but was not tipsy."

Now, no suspicion that the stranger was even flustered by drink had entered the minds of his late military custodians, or he would never have been admitted within the pickets. Hold, when questioned before, had seemed as sober as a Good Templar. There is, however, as men of the world know, such a thing as latent intoxication, precisely as

there is such a thing as latent heat ; and even such a seasoned vessel as Richard Hold may suddenly, under excitement, feel the staggering effects of brandy swallowed hours ago.

“It was on business, I think, that you had to speak to me ?” said Lord Harrogate cheerfully.

“Business, I guess, can be of more sorts than one,” rapped out the seaman argumentatively. “To reeve a rope for a rogue’s neck is one sort o’ business ; and to clinker on the irons of the chain-gang at Perth, W. A., or Bermuda, or Gib (I’ve seen the convicts most everywhere ; though, mind ye, I never wore the Queen’s canary-suit), is another. Rough customers are most of those that get a sentence of penal servi-

tude. It's on a gentleman—say on Sir Sykes Denzil, Baronet—the punishment falls the heaviest.”

“What do you mean? Or by what right do you drag the name of a landed gentleman of high position into your rambling talk?” asked Lord Harrogate, very sternly.

Hold, as though the young man's severe demeanour had excited instead of sobering him, broke into a crowing laugh of scorn. “That mealy-mouthed hypocrite!” he exclaimed; “and he, forsooth, is a gentleman of high position, to play skipper to my swabber, I suppose, though I've more pluck in my little finger than Sir Sykes Denzil, Baronet, has in his whole body. It isn't to a poor young thing—and she a widow and a lady—I'd owe a grudge, and still less to an

innocent baby-girl that had no more harmed him than—— If it were all to come over again, I'm as certain as I stand here that I'd have gone to that young Lady Harrogate herself, and said "——

Something here seemed to flit across Hold's clouded mind, for he started, bit his lip, and became silent.

"Did you know that young Lady Harrogate of whom you have made mention, and who has been long dead?" asked Lord Harrogate encouragingly.

"Maybe I did, and maybe I didn't," grudgingly returned Richard, whose vein of communicativeness no longer flowed freely. "I've had sunstroke, mister, and knocks on the head too, on the topsy-turvy side of the world, that ought to excuse me if I talk a

bit wild when I get liquor aboard. I'm Jack ashore. Nobody minds a sailor."

It was in vain that Lord Harrogate plied him with questions. A change had come over the man's mood, and his dogged caution was as prominent as had lately been his garrulous bravado. It was evident that he regretted his recent avowal, and that being unable to recall it, he would say no more. Then came muffled noises from without, a single low roll of the drum, and the passing of the word from man to man.

"The brigade to which you are attached, Lord Harrogate, is to get under arms and march at once," said an aide-de-camp, putting his head into the canvas doorway of the tent. "'Quick and silent,' are Lord Moffat's orders."

"You must make your mind up, Mr. Hold," said the young Lord, as he caught up his sword and buckled it on, "as to whether you prefer to speak, or to have had your journey for nothing."

The master-mariner shook his head sullenly. "You titled swells back one another, right or wrong," he muttered querulously. "A plain man like me might have known it."

"I back nobody in wrong, for my poor part," replied Lord Harrogate, as he made his hasty preparations for a start. His soldier-servant was already aiding a couple of privates to strike the tent.

"I don't believe you do, my Lord!" exclaimed Hold irresolutely; "you don't fly false colours at the main, whoever does."

If you knew that a girl, as noble in blood as yourself, was robbed of her rights, and made to pass for a mere nobody's child, in the very place that"——

"Harrogate, the Colonel only waits for you!" cried the breathless adjutant, as he stood panting at the door. Without, was heard the steady tramp of marching feet and the rattle of arms.

"One moment, Vicars!" said Lord Harrogate.—"You see, Mr. Hold, go I must. Will you give me some address, at which this conversation can be renewed?"

Almost mechanically, Dick drew out one of the cards of old Plugger's.

"I'll look you up there," cried Lord Harrogate, as he darted out into the night. Then came the smothered sound of voices,

as the words of command were given, and then the regular hurried tramp of many feet. The brigade had marched, leaving Mr. Richard Hold to regain his gig, his railway station, and ultimately London, as best he might.

CHAPTER XVII.

AT BUNDELCUND MANSIONS.

“I WILL take your card in to Mr. Sturgis, sir. I don’t know, I’m sure, about his being well enough to see you ; but perhaps you’ll please to wait,” said the tall, prim, grim parlour-maid who acted as janitress of the front-door of a slack-baked villa at Putney, one of twin villas, which were called—at the express desire of the inhabitant of the other one, old Colonel Chutnee, H.E.I.C.S.—Bundelcund Mansions. They were capacious villas these, as might be augured from the grandiloquent name that

had been fathered upon them ; and they had pleasant gardens, with shaven turf, weeping-willows, and azalea beds in the first style of suburban gardening, sloping down to the river at the gentle curve of Putney Reach.

No. 1, Bundelcund Mansions, belonged, so far as lease and furniture went, to Colonel Chutnee ; No. 2, Bundelcund Mansions, to Ebenezer Sturgis, Esq., retired from the practice of law. Lord Harrogate, who was the visitor-expectant at the ex-lawyer's outer portals, had often heard of Mr. Sturgis, as having been formerly solicitor to that young Baroness Harrogate who had been so unfortunate as wife and mother, and to his own father the Earl ; but he had never seen Mr. Sturgis.

The Aldershot Autumn Manœuvres were over, the troops dispersed, and the victory of Lord Moffat over Sir David Roberts—hard won, and much trumpeted by the newspapers, whose correspondents had accompanied the respective staffs of the belligerent generals—was already as much forgotten by the public as the shreds of cartridge-cases that lay strewn among the Wessex stubble-fields. Lord Harrogate had time now to attend to the queer business broached by that respectable person, Mr. Richard Hold.

“Master will see you, sir—my Lord,” said the grim, prim parlour-maid, dropping a flurried courtesy, in acknowledgment of the rank of the visitor, as she returned.

“Only you must please walk into the
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garden. He's mostly there in the fine weather."

Hard by the water's edge, in a leafy arbour, overrun with American creepers, with the morning newspapers neatly arranged upon a table beside him, and a long slender fishing-rod lying on the turf within reach, was Mr. Sturgis, a little nervous-mannered, trimly-attired old gentleman, who shaded his eyes with one thin white hand, and then held it out in salutation.

"You've a De Vere face, my Lord," he said, rising from his chair. "A boy you were, a boy when I saw you last. But I have known so many of the name."

Mr. Sturgis was deaf; and it was through the serpentine tube of an ear-trumpet that Lord Harrogate had to explain the object

of his visit. He wished, he said, that Mr. Sturgis would so far oblige him as to recall his recollections of the time when Clare, Baroness Harrogate, lost that only child who would in due course have succeeded her in the title that had now lapsed to the Wolverhampton line. Was it not true—a proper explanation should be forthcoming as to the reason for the inquiry—that Mr. Sturgis had been at the late Lady Harrogate's cottage-residence, beside the Thames, on the very day of the child's drowning? Was it not also true that there were some suspicions of foul play?

The little old lawyer fidgeted very much with his yellow silk pocket-handkerchief, his gold-rimmed spectacles, and a tiny gold snuff-box that lay on the table at his elbow,

before he returned any answer to these questions. "Poor young thing! poor young creature!" he said at last. "Yes; I was there. I attended her ladyship in Berkshire, there, at her request, to see to the proper execution of some legal documents relating to the trifling property her late husband the Colonel had left behind him; and within a few minutes of my reaching Holly Cottage, the accident occurred. Ah, to be sure! It was sad, very sad!"

"You speak of it, I perceive, as an accident?" said Lord Harrogate interrogatively. "There were reports, I believe, to the contrary?"

"Why, yes," replied Mr. Sturgis, in a slow reluctant tone. "The vulgar, your Lordship knows, like a spice of the marvel-

lous, especially when a death is in question, and there were ugly rumours flying about—soon hushed up and forgotten, though.”

“Do you imagine that there was any substratum of solid truth underlying these rumours?” asked Lord Harrogate through the trumpet.

“Now, my dear sir—my dear Lord—that’s a leading question,” said the little lawyer argumentatively, and laying one weak hand on his visitor’s coat-sleeve. “What we have to deal with, as men of business and men of the world, are first facts, and then probabilities. The case *prima facie* was a very simple one. Child, of tender years, left alone on terrace overlooking river—scream heard—infant’s body vainly sought for in the Thames—a very melancholy but

common-place concatenation of circumstances. Nothing but the rank of the parties called attention to the misfortune."

"And yet, Mr. Sturgis, you do not believe that things passed in this commonplace, everyday fashion?" said Lord Harrogate.

"*Argumentum ad hominem*, my Lord—*argumentum ad*— Ah! whisssh!" exclaimed Mr. Sturgis, tottering to his feet and flourishing his arms like an insane semaphore — "whisssh! you bloodthirsty animal!"

And as he spoke, he flung a short cudgel, that lay concealed among the leafy walls of the harbour, into a clump of rose-bushes a few yards distant. A large cat, scared by the hostile demonstration, scuttled hastily towards the boundary-wall, leaped into a

tree, and regaining the neutral ground of the brickwork, turned, with arching back and swollen tail, and glared at its human enemy.

“One of old Chutnee’s cats—the Colonel’s cats; Persians, he calls them; but they are neither deaf nor white, so that’s all nonsense—after my pigeons!” explained Mr. Sturgis. “I saw the brindled monster, the same that robbed me of two pretty fantails and a pouter, stealing like a tigerkin through the bushes. Most encroaching, unprincipled, odious old fellow is that neighbour of mine. I wish he were back with his sepoy. I wish he had stopped in that detestable Bundelcund, the heathenish name of which he was pigheaded enough to get painted on this house of mine, as if I, of all people, were a Qui Hi, like himself.”

"Uncongenial tastes," said Lord Harrogate, smiling, "must detract a great deal from the pleasures of good neighbourhood."

"Good neighbourhood indeed!" cried Mr. Sturgis irritably. "I might as well be cheek-by-jowl with a Pindharee or a Dacoo, or any other of the outlandish robbers that the Colonel spent such part of his life in hunting as he could spare from billiards and bitter beer and brandy pawnee. It's not only his cats—it's everything! His very hookah, in which he smokes rascally eastern drugs, to which tobacco is harmless, poisons the air. He trespasses on everything. He ground-baits for fish until the dace in the river turn up their noses at paste or gentle. He lets long lines, all over hooks, trail down the current, entangling the tackle of other

anglers. There's nothing, really nothing, of which that redfaced Half-pay is not capable, and until he dies of apoplexy, there will be no comfort for me !”

It was evident that there was a standing feud between the man of war and the man of peace. It cost Lord Harrogate some trouble to divert the ex-lawyer's mind from Colonel Chutnee and his misdoings to his own reminiscences as to that sad little episode that had been enacted years before at Holly Cottage. And it proved impossible to pin so slippery a witness to the point as concerned his own impressions with respect to the cause of the catastrophe. Mr. Sturgis was one of those casuists who have been blessed, or the reverse, with that peculiarly legal intellect which takes delight in the

niceties of mental straw-splitting, and the edge of which is too fine for the practical work of this rough-and-ready world. He was timid too, and nervously reluctant—having the fear of the law of libel perpetually before his eyes, wherever Colonel Chutnee was not the subject of discourse—to speak his mind. Nevertheless, Lord Harrogate gathered from the ex-solicitor's guarded talk that the speaker's delicately balanced opinion inclined towards the hypothesis that there *had* been something wrong. It was singular that the poor little thing's body had never been recovered. Men had been dragging, dragging night and day; and not the river Thames alone, but every creek, backwater, weir, and pool had been examined within miles. That the infant had been murdered,

was a supposition grossly improbable. It was no one's interest to make away with the heiress of a barren title. Kidnapping was, under the circumstances, almost as unlikely as murder. Gipsies, credited in popular belief with such offences, had never been taxed with stealing a child too young to beg, and who would therefore be useless to the strolling tribe. Nor would the lithest Zingari be bold and deft enough to venture on a theft so audacious, so difficult, and so unprofitable.

Yet, though Mr. Sturgis glibly enumerated all the grounds on which a verdict of 'Accidental drowning' might be returned by a coroner's jury, Lord Harrogate felt more and more convinced that the little lawyer in his heart of hearts believed that something was amiss.

"Rumours were afloat at the time," said Lord Harrogate; "and unless I am greatly mistaken, inquiries were made?"

Mr. Sturgis assented. "Idle tongues wagged," he said, "in various circles of society; and we sifted, as was our duty—I speak of myself and of my esteemed coadjutors, Messrs. Pounce and Pontifex—much loose gossip, and found a residuum of—nothing. There was much assertion, but not an iota of proof."

However, at the close of the interview, Mr. Sturgis hospitably pressed on his visitor a glass of old Madeira—"Very rare, my Lord, existing only in a few private cellars; the present, forty years since, of a ducal client of mine."

After some further quiet conversation

upon the mysterious subject in hand, the lawyer put into the possession of Lord Harrogate the half of a card torn in two, which had for two decades reposed peaceably in the recesses of his own desk; and told him that this card, picked up on the towing-path by one of the men employed in searching for the child's body, was the only fragment of mute evidence that was now in existence.

CHAPTER XVIII.

INTRODUCES A NEW ELEMENT.

LORD HARROGATE, as he turned his back on Bundelcund Mansions—on quitting which he caught a glimpse of the redoubtable Colonel Chutnee, corpulent, choleric, and purple-faced, being helped by an obsequious Hindu bearer and a meek London footboy to emerge from the Bath-chair in which he was daily drawn forth for exercise—felt his mind was in a whirl. He had been familiar from his boyhood with the vague outlines of the melancholy history of that young and beautiful Clare, Baroness Harrogate, who

had for a short time borne the title which was now his.

It had never occurred to Lord Harrogate to connect Sir Sykes Denzil with the disappearance of the missing child, who, had she lived, would have been in her own right a peeress of England, until Hold's strange words, uttered on the occasion of his visit to the camp, had given rise to strange suspicions. Then he remembered to have heard of savage threats breathed by the present possessor of Carbery Chase against that youthful Lady Harrogate who had been betrothed to him, and who had eloped with Colonel De Vere, her cousin. Hitherto, he had only regarded these menaces as a foolish outburst of ill-temper and bad taste, not at all in accordance with the usual

demeanour of the decorous Sir Sykes, and probably forgotten, or only treasured up with shame and regret, by him who spoke them.

Hold's words had made an impression which Lord Harrogate could not shake off; and without giving full credence to the seaman's insinuations, he determined within his own breast that duty urged him to sift this business to the bottom. But what was he to do? To consult the family lawyers was in such a case out of the question. Even had not Sir Sykes been their client, Messrs. Pounce and Pontifex were by no means the sort of practitioners whose interest would be easily awakened in such an affair. Their business was with mortgages and marriage settlements, not with murders. Their

special mission was to make things comfortable for estated clients, and Crime was a monster of which they only read, like other honest folks, in the newspapers.

Still, Lord Harrogate felt the need of professional assistance in the quest which he had undertaken, and for a minute the vision of a Private Inquiry Office flitted before his mind's eye. Mr. Adamopolos or Herr Nicolai, of St. Mary Axe and Clerkenwell Green respectively, would either of them cheerfully charge himself with the cracking of a harder nut than this. Then there recurred to Lord Harrogate's mind the saying of a knowing friend, Major Raffington of the clubs, with whom half the peerage were on speaking terms.

“Hang those men of mystery with their
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advertisements in the Agony columns, and their highly-trained staff of human truffle-dogs, warranted to scent out a scandal in the depths of a coal-pit, if need be! The regular fellows at Scotland Yard are at any rate under discipline, and so far, more satisfactory to deal with." Such had been the dictum of Major Raffington, whose Pall-Mall philosophy was in its narrow way sound enough; and the remembrance of it decided Lord Harrogate as to his course of action. A wandering Hansom cab coming within signalling distance, he beckoned to the driver. "Scotland Yard!"

At the central police-office of Scotland Yard, Lord Harrogate's reception, when once his name and errand were disclosed, was characterised by that unimpassioned

politeness which is traditional with the veteran officers of that blue-coated army of peace to which we look for protection.

In reply to his request for the services of a detective, Lord Harrogate, after a brief delay and the despatch of a special messenger, was introduced to Inspector Drew. Lord Harrogate, like most of us, had read and heard much of detectives, but he had never seen one. That he did see one, then, was what it required no trifling exertion of faith to believe. Inspector Drew did not look in the least like a policeman. There was none of that military bearing which some of the guardians of our homes and hearths affect, no air of being a drilled and disciplined champion of social order about him. His plain clothes were very

plain, and fitted him loosely withal, nor did he wear the portentous clanking boots to which ordinary detectives cling so tenaciously. A careful, decent sort of person to look upon was Inspector Drew, and one who might easily have been mistaken for a master-carpenter in a small way of business, or a town-traveller in hardware, or a struggling builder with a couple of terraces and a crescent or so, mortgaged and unfinished, always on his mind.

The inspector listened with patient respect to what Lord Harrogate had to say, making brief notes at intervals with a blunt pencil in a burly pocket-book. The questions which he asked were few and very much to the purpose. What seemed to interest him the most were dates and names, whether of

persons or places, and these he carefully jotted down, trusting to his memory for the outlines of the story. When the story was concluded, he put up his book and pencil, and smiled deferentially from behind his hat.

"You seem," said Lord Harrogate, who had noticed the smile, "not to credit the idea that the child's disappearance was the result of a crime."

"Well, you see, my Lord," returned the detective, rolling up his handkerchief, which he kept in the crown of his hat, into the semblance of a red cricket-ball, "there was, so far as I can learn, no money on it. And where there's no money on it, nine times out of ten there's nothing up."

Inspector Drew threw into this axiom all

the weight of his well-matured conviction on the subject ; but his noble employer was less staggered than he, the inspector, had anticipated. It was natural, Lord Harrogate thought, that a policeman should contemplate the world from a policeman's point of view, setting down all offences against person and property to the score of dishonesty or drink ; but he himself felt that greed was not the only conceivable motive for a lawless act.

"There is such a thing as revenge," he said quietly.

"Well, there is," answered the detective, with frank recognition of an exception to his own somewhat narrow rule of theoretical conduct. "I have known instances. There's been a grudge, you may say, and there's been

a chance. Even, there may have been a little hanging about and lying in wait ; but bless you ! not much of it."

"You imply," said Lord Harrogate, after a moment's consideration, "that the bestowing of time and thought and care on a malignant purpose is rare, and that most malicious deeds are hasty ones?"

"You've spoken my thoughts, my Lord," said the inspector complacently, "better than I could have shaped 'em. People don't take trouble, even the trouble to do mischief, gratis."

But Lord Harrogate was not inclined to defer on this point, even to so high an authority as that of a superior officer of the metropolitan police. To Inspector Drew, who earned his bread by bringing

under the lash of justice the rogues who earned *their* bread—or the butter to it—by nefarious industry, deliberate villainy, committed neither to save money nor to get money, seemed as unlikely as the dream of a poet. Let there be a pecuniary motive, and the inspector could believe the ugliest story that could be told, but he had no faith in eleemosynary scoundrelism.

Lord Harrogate was of another way of thinking. He had not, in his explanation furnished to the detective, made mention of Sir Sykes Denzil's name; but remembering the baronet's persistent melancholy and Hold's hints, he could not but entertain considerable suspicion as to the real character of the supposed accident that had occurred so long ago. He had little liking

for the task on which he found himself, as it were perforce, engaged ; but there was in his nature a dash of chivalry, which forbade him to sit with folded hands while a wrong inflicted long ago upon the helpless and unoffending remained unpunished and unrighted.

“I cannot quite agree with you there,” said Lord Harrogate seriously ; “though I am not surprised that you should rely on the teachings of your own experience. Granted that self-interest is the mainspring of most crimes. Coiners and forgers are not amateurs, and people do not pick pockets or practice burglary for mere amusement. But you rather underrate the temptations to which an unprincipled man of sufficient education, large means,

and ample leisure might succumb, when brooding over a real or fancied injury. I don't know, Inspector, whether I have succeeded in conveying my meaning quite clearly?"

The inspector nodded. "Idle hands," he said, with some hazy recollections of the poetry of Dr. Watts, "do get queer jobs to do, and a queer tradesmaster to teach 'em. And I'm quite ready to admit, my Lord, that one man cannot know the world all round, and that there are little games the deepest of us may not be up to. I think your Lordship spoke of a bit of a torn letter or a card as having been picked up near the water-side, when the search for the child was in progress?"

No modern student of Assyrian legend

lovingly poring over the cuneiform characters on a scrap of Babylonian brick, could have eyed the treasured tablet of inestimable clay with a more scrutinising care than that with which Inspector Drew examined this fragment of yellow pasteboard. The card, evidently the half of a visiting-card, bore on its face the words—

STANDISH

dier Guards ;

and on the back,

WILKINS

ney.

“Wilkins !” muttered the inspector, tapping his forehead, as though that process would arouse or assist his memory. “I know a few such, but none at this moment likely.—Does your Lordship know the hand ?”

Lord Harrogate looked at the faded handwriting, coarse but painstaking and legible, and was compelled to own that he did not know it.

“Not a gentleman’s hand—is it now?” said the detective critically.

“No,” Lord Harrogate answered, smiling ; “I think not. Many gentlemen write worse, but none, as far as my experience goes, with clumsy carefulness like this.”

“Didn’t it strike your Lordship as a bit odd,” said Inspector Drew smoothly, “that a rough chap who handles a pen as a house-painter handles a brush, should have been trying his pot-hooks on the back of what seems to have been the visiting-card of an officer in the Guards?”

The same reflection on his way from Bundelcund Mansions to Scotland Yard, had presented itself to the mind of Lord Harrogate, and he readily said so. It was the inspector's turn to smile.

"If your Lordship will condescend to look through these glasses," he said, handing the card and a horn-rimmed arrangement of lenses across the table, "I think you'll see a trifle deeper into the millstone than you did."

And by the aid of the magnifier, which was a powerful one, Lord Harrogate could distinguish the almost obliterated traces of the original pencilled words, in another and more delicate hand, over which the pen-and-ink writing now stood.

"Certainly, the writer may have had this

card legitimately in his possession, for aught we know."

"Real old copper engraved, you see, the card itself, on the face of it," said the detective with quite an archæological interest in visiting tickets; "none of your modern steel plates and stone-cutting, and so forth. But we mustn't go too fast, my Lord. Anybody may collar hold of a card to wind fishing-lines upon, or thread, or anything. An angler, or an old woman knitting stockings, may have dropped this thing, that we study as if it were a thousand-pound note."

Lord Harrogate thereupon suggested that the Standish in the Grenadier Guards whose name appeared on the card, could, if living, be easily traced, and volunteered to make

the necessary inquiries at the War Office if, as seemed likely, the name should prove to figure no longer in the *Army List*. Inspector Drew undertook to put a finger, if possible, on the particular Wilkins referred to in the brief MS. before him, and also to ascertain all that could be learned as to the antecedents of Mr. Richard Hold.

“I’d think twice, my Lord, before I trusted myself at Plugger’s, after dark at any rate,” said the detective gravely, when Lord Harrogate mentioned his purpose of returning the visit which Hold had paid him in his tent during the autumn campaign. “I could show you cribs less respectable by a deal where there’s less risk for them that have something to lose, than at Plugger’s. If you’d like company when you go there——

320 HELENA, LADY HARROGATE.

Ah, well, well ! Don't wet your lips with anything you may be offered in the way of liquor, and choose broad day for the trip, if you'll take my advice, my Lord."

END OF VOL. II.





